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# ASSISI OF ST. FRANCIS

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# ASSISI OF ST FRANCIS











ASSISI: CAPELLA DEI PELEGRINI

*Charles Cuthbert (the Londoner) Goff*

# ASSISI

## OF SAINT FRANCIS

BY MRS ROBERT GOFF: ILLUSTRATED  
BY COLONEL R. GOFF: *TOGETHER WITH*  
THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRANCISCAN  
LEGEND ON ITALIAN ART, BY J. KERR-  
LAWSON, WITH REPRODUCTIONS  
AFTER THE OLD MASTERS



LONDON  
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*To*  
MY SISTERS



## PREFACE

THE task of writing an historical sketch of Assisi is no light one, since the material at the disposition of the student is extremely voluminous. I have, except for the lives of St Francis and St Clare, chosen only a few episodes from the eventful, and somewhat monotonous story of the little city, episodes that appeared to me likely to prove interesting to the general reader.

Students of the Franciscan legend have, of late years, greatly increased in England and America, and since many of these are outside the communion of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, an element of controversy has not unnaturally affected the conclusions of these students: this element I have been at great pains to exclude in the brief rendering of the Legend here offered. With this aim in view I have endeavoured to tell the beautiful story of St Francis of Assisi as simply as is possible, relying principally upon the oldest and undisputed sources, namely the *Vita Prima* and *Vita Secunda* of Thomas of Celano, and the *Antiqua Legenda* of the *Three Companions*.

In conclusion I desire to express my most grateful thanks to the many kind friends who have given me help and sympathy in my work, to the Bishop of Assisi and to Monsignore Andrea Tini the Vicar General, who with unfailing kindness supplied me

## Preface

with many especially useful books, to Mr Montgomery Carmichael, Monsieur Paul Sabatier, Dr J. P. Richter; and also to Signor C. G. Venanzi for much local information, and for permission to include in this work his maps and plans of the city, maps and plans which have only been completed within the last few months.

With my collaborators, my husband and Mr J. Kerr-Lawson, who contributes an essay on the "Influence of the Franciscan Legend on Italian Art," I express the hope that our work may prove acceptable, and before bidding it "God speed" I would fain address this prayer to all who may read this book and make the pilgrimage to the Seraphic City—to remember the poor and needy of his birth-place, those best-beloved of St Francis, and also the dumb creatures who recognized his compassionate solicitude:

O Francis, never may thy sainted name  
Be thought or written save with soul aflame,  
Nor spoken openly, nor breathed apart  
Without a stir or swelling of the heart:  
O mate of Poverty! O pearl unpriced  
O co-espoused, co-transfornate with Christ.

W. H. Meyers

CLARISSA GOFF

*San Domenico di Fiesole*  
*April, 1908.*

The text used for the quotations from Dante's *Paradiso* is that of the Rev. P. H. Wicksteed, in the Temple Classics; the quotations from the Fioretti are made from the revised and augmented translation by Prof. T. W. Arnold, issued this year by the present publishers.



# CONTENTS

## *Assisi of St Francis*

<i>Chap. I.</i>	Assisi before St Francis	<i>Page</i> 1
II.	Assisi in the Eleventh Century	13
III.	Pietro Bernardone's Son	22
IV.	The Parting of the Ways	35
V.	The Search after Righteousness	45
VI.	The Strait Gate	52
VII.	The Herald of the Great King	58
VIII.	The First Companions	66
IX.	The Divine Mission	74
X.	The First Seal	80
XI.	Clare of the Scefì	88
XII.	The Foundation of the Poor Clares	94
XIII.	The Apostolate	100
XIV.	Progress of the Order	111
XV.	The Ultimate Seal	121
XVI.	The Death of St Francis	130
XVII.	The Saint	139
XVIII.	The Foundation of the Basilica	147
XIX.	The Princess of the Poor	154
XX.	Guelph and Ghibelline Factions	161
XXI.	The Confraternities and Institutions	169
XXII.	The Rival Families	176
XXIII.	Assisi Incorporated into the Papal States	181
XXIV.	Conclusion	188

## *Contents*

### APPENDICES.

Modern Assisi 197

Modern Assisi, The Churches 204

### THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRANCISCAN

LEGEND ON ITALIAN ART 237

Index 283

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## *Assisi of St Francis*

### Coloured Plates

Capella dei Pellegrini	<i>Frontispiece</i>
The Rocca Minore and Rugged Slopes under the City Walls, East to North	<i>Facing p. 18</i>
La Rocca d'Assisi	36
Perugia: The Duomo, with the open-air Pulpit and Bronze Statue of Pope Julius II	40
The Church and Convent of Sta Chiara	50
In the Cloisters of S. Damiano	55
Procession leaving Church of S. Pietro	63
Autumn Tints	77
The Fountain, Piazza Della Minerva	84
The Temple of Minerva	86
The Market before the Temple of Minerva	90
Sta Maria degli Angeli—the Porziuncula	108
Sta Maria degli Angeli—the Porziuncula	130
The City, seen from Perugia	136
The Refectory of the Convent of S. Damiano	140
The Eastward View from the City	146
The Monastery of S. Francesco	150
Oratorio delle Stimmate	156
Palazzo Comunale	161
The Monte Frumentario	172
Church of S. Francesco and Gorge of the Tescio	176
The Fonte Marcella by Galeazzo Alessi	184
The Church of S. Francesco Assisi from the Tescio	197
The Oratory of S. Bernardino of Siena in the Ora- tory of the Carceri	202

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Piazza Inferiore di S. Francesco, showing the Loggie and the Two Churches of S. Francesco	<i>facing p.</i> 208
Entrance to the Lower Church of S. Francesco	210
The Eastern Transept of the Lower Church of S. Francesco	214
The Nave of the Lower Church with the Chapel of S. Martino on the left	218
The Nave of the Upper Church of S. Francesco	222
Porta S. Giacomo seen from the entrance to the Upper Church of S. Francesco	223
The City from Porta S. Pietro, looking westwards towards the Church of S. Francesco	227
Piazza S. Rufino with the Western Door of the Duomo	230

## Sepia Plates

The City seen from Spello	6
The City seen from Rivo Torto	48
Porta S. Francesco	60
Old Houses and Gardens—overlooking the Plain of Umbria	70
S. Damiano	97
From the Road to Perugia	112
Rivo Torto, Assisi—Procession of St Anthony of Padua	120
Hermitage of the Carceri	124
The River "Tescio"	166
Courtyard of the Hermitage of the Carceri	178
Monks' Cells, the Carceri	192
Porta S. Giacomo	232



## *Illustrations*

### Drawings in Text

Assisi, looking West from Porta S. Francesco	3
General View of Assisi	15
Perugia: A Procession of Monks	29
Assisi: Via Antonio Sermalli	33
Assisi: The Pentecostal Fair in front of the Church of S. Pietro	61
Assisi: La Verna, Casentino, Tuscany	103

## *The Influence of the Franciscan Legend on Italian Art*

### Coloured Plates

The Gonfalone of S. Bernardino (After the original banner by Benedetto Bonfigli in the Pinacoteca Vanucci, Perugia)	
	<i>Frontispiece to Essay, facing p. 238</i>
The Crucifixion (After the fresco by Cimabue in the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi)	248
The Virgin Enthroned with Saints (After the tempera panel by Luca Signorelli in the Duomo at Perugia)	265
SS. Vincent, Catherine of Alexandria, and Nicholas (After the tempera panel by Antoniazio Romano (?) [lo Spagna (? ?)] in the Church of S. Francesco at Montefalco)	267
S. Giacomo Apostolo (After the fresco by Pier Antonio da Foligno in the Capella dei Pellegrini, Assisi)	275
The Coronation of the Virgin (After the tempera panel by Bernardino di Mariotto in the Pinacoteca Vanucci at Perugia)	276

## *Assisi of St Francis*

- The Coronation of the Virgin with SS. Bernardino  
and Antonio (After the tempera panel by  
Niccolò di Liberatore da Foligno, called Nic-  
colò Alunno [painted before 1499] in the  
Church of S. Niccolò at Foligno) 278
- A Miracle of S. Bernardino (After the tempera  
panel by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo (?) in the  
Pinacoteca Vanucci, Sala XIII, at Perugia) 280

# ASSISI OF SAINT FRANCIS

## CHAPTER I

### Assisi before St Francis

La Cuna di Francesco è della luce  
Vestita di costui, come d' un sole,  
E rifiorisce di sì gran figliuolo  
Dai nuovi raggi illuminata. Ascesi,  
Antica terra che guarda la valle  
Che da Spoleto ha nome e che si spiega  
Convessa lungo il ripido pendio  
D' olivifera balza, e le sue case  
Dalla cima digrada alle radici.

*Il più antico Poema della Vita di S. Francesco d' Assisi.*

**O**N a spur of the Subasio range of mountains, which runs north of the valley of Spoleto, lies the city of Assisi. It clings to the rugged mountain-side, rising and climbing, terrace upon terrace—a mass of golden-coloured building—up to the foot of the ancient savage Rocca, the ruined citadel, which, like some lonely sentinel, gazes from the hill-summit far across the mountains and the valleys lying below and around it. At the two extremities of the town stand the world-famous shrines, facing each other across the length and breadth of the city—the great Basilica of S. Francesco to the west and the church and convent of Sta Chiara to the east.

At the foot of Monte Subasio, gazing downwards from the terraces or windows of Assisi, you may see the fertile plain of Umbria spreading away into infinite blue distances.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Fields of sainfoin and fields of corn lie, green and pink and gold, beneath the sun, and among them run long, straight lines of gnarled grey olive trees, verdant mulberries, and maples supporting graceful vine garlands, while here and there may be perceived the sturdier growth of oak and poplar. The landscape is full of peaceful pastoral charm enhanced by occasional glimpses of the winding torrent Tescio, and by brown roofs of yellow farmsteads bordering the white roads which lead from Ponte San Giovanni to Bevagna, and from Rivo Torto to the great sanctuary of Sta Maria degli Angeli, the solemn cupola of which seems to dominate the entire valley.

Leaving the broad plain, the eye follows the high mountain ranges which sweep away towards Rome. On their steep flanks lie many romantic cities, to the east Spello and Foligno, while more remote, and faintly traced against the mountain slope, even Spoleto, may also be discerned. To the south a low jutting spur bears on its crest the towers of Montefalco, while to the west Perugia challenges the eye, crowning the highest summit of the barest of all the mountain peaks. Grim and superb, menacing the plain at her feet, the ancient Papal City with her magnificent outlines completes the *Ringhiera dell' Umbria*.

The clustering cities of the valley of Spoleto no longer tremble at the frown of Perugia, and fight no more to the death with a foreign foe. The days when the men of Assisi wrestled mightily, with great blood-shedding, against the men of Bevagna for possession of the bones of S. Crispolto, or assisted the Guelphs of Spoleto to chase from their walls the hated Ghibellines, are now long passed away.

Peace broods over the golden valley, where in these latter days the old-world cities sleep, dreaming of a glorious past, cherishing their ancient traditions, and the memory of many a famous deed of arms accomplished by their sons in days



ASSISI, LOOKING WEST FROM PORTA S. FRANCESCO.



## *Assisi before St Francis*

long dead. The old fashion has passed away, never to return; but visions of Pope and Saint, of Emperor and Duke, still haunt the Umbrian towns, lending enchantment to their narrow picturesque streets, their tall belfries, and their venerable flower-grown walls; filling also with individual glory the holy sanctuaries which through long ages have guarded the dust of the great Saints of Umbria.

To King Dardanus, founder of Troy, son of Jupiter and Electra—the Prince who did not shrink from fratricide in order to secure for himself the Kingdom of Etruria—is ascribed the foundation of the Seraphic City. Shadowy indeed are the old myths, but poetical and delightful; and fain would the historian of Assisi believe that the shadow of Dardanus fell upon the stony side of Monte Subasio or ever the Umbri inhabited the Province.

The Umbri, however, were not a mythical tribe. From them the Province of Umbria derived its name, the only record of its occupation by this primitive people who were driven from their possessions by the Etruscans. These latter, unlike the Umbri, have left their mark upon the valley of Spoleto, and traces of their wonderful civilization still remain in many a massive wall and gateway, and in many a hill-side cavern where, in the all-pervading gloom, stand dimly discerned and ghostly sepulchres, still containing the handful of dust confided to their care in the remote ages before our era dawned.

In the year B.C. 309 the Roman invaders conquered and annexed Umbria. The Etruscan cities naturally fell under the Roman form of government, and were doubtless no losers by the new order. With the advent of the Roman empire fine public buildings arose in Assisi, and the Forum, centre of civic life in all important Roman cities, was adorned with magnificent temples and marble statues of the gods and emperors. Water was conveyed through great aqueducts into the



## *Assisi of St Francis*

heart of the city, and a vast *Cloaca Maxima* was constructed, destined later, in the time of Charlemagne, to prove the cause which brought about the destruction of Roman Assisi. Seven feet below the level of the existing Piazza Grande, the old pavement of the Forum has been laid bare. Raised above it on the northern side, and approached by an imposing flight of steps, stood the great temple dedicated to Minerva, the portico of which remains in splendid condition to this day. Mr Freeman, in his sympathetic and charming description of Assisi, taking as his authority a Roman inscription found there, contends that originally this temple was dedicated to the heavenly twins—Castor and Pollux. Yet, notwithstanding this record, the portico still bears the name of the Goddess of Wisdom, whose worship Dardanus introduced among the mythical ancestors of the courteous and friendly modern Assisians. Pure and classic in line, superbly pagan in conception, “la Minerva,” that a century ago filled Goethe with a transport of rapturous admiration, remains the most perfect monument of Roman Assisi.

The “scavi” or excavations below the Piazza Grande are well worth a visit from the lover of archæology, who, by following a steep path leading past the cathedral of S. Rufino, will find further traces of the Roman occupation of Assisi. Here, sunk literally at the very foot of the cathedral belfry, is a deep cistern, lined with enormous blocks of travertine—a reservoir, built in Roman times to collect and purify the water brought from the Forum of Sextus. The fine masonry of this interesting specimen of Roman work still awakens a feeling of wonder and admiration in the mind of the beholder. Gazing down into its wide mouth, and observing the dimensions of each single block of stone which went to line its depth, it truly appears a labour of giants.

A few steps beyond the ancient cistern a Roman archway, built into the wall of a modern house, marks the site





VIEW OF ASSISI, FROM SPELLO



## *Assisi before St Francis*

where once the theatre opened its doors to the thronging citizens.

Over against this archway a small building, in form resembling some low tower, is all that remains of a Roman mausoleum, gently crumbling away in the warm Italian sunshine which has mellowed its venerable walls, and spreads at its feet a carpet of green grass embroidered with softly-tinted wild flowers. The steep path by the old cistern terminates at the Piazza Nuova, the ancient "Forum of Sextus," on the north-west side of which stands all that remains of the Roman amphitheatre. Time has partially obliterated the traces of this once interesting memorial, and the site is, moreover, almost entirely covered by a number of small buildings, chiefly dwelling-houses, constructed in the space once occupied by the arena. Among these buildings one, resembling a loggia, served during a period of the city's history as a slaughter-house.

Under Roman government Assisi increased in material prosperity. Its commerce and agriculture grew rapidly, and the city developed not in beauty alone but, encouraged and supported by the wealthier citizens, produced many scholars, poets and artists.

It claims to be the birthplace of three Latin poets, the best-known of whom is Sextus Aurelius Propertius, not the least among the great poets of the Augustan Age. It must, however, be admitted that this claim is open to dispute, for Spello, Spoleto and Bevagna are all rivals for the honour of having given birth to the elegant elegiac poet whose scarcely flattering portrait Horace painted in the second book of his "Epistles." Be this as it may, Propertius was certainly born beneath the shadow of Monte Subasio, and a Roman tablet inscribed to the family of Propertius, and preserved in Assisi, at least affords good reason to believe that he was a citizen of that place. At any rate, a mystery surrounds the

## *Assisi of St Francis*

poet's birthplace, a mystery perhaps caused and accounted for by the early death of his father, and the removal from her native town of the widow and her son. The mother of Propertius left Assisi to join her brother, then living in Perugia, and after his death during the great siege of that city in B.C. 40, settled with the young Propertius in Rome.

Thus it came to pass that Propertius, quitting his native province in childhood, lived his life in Rome. He was a delicate and effeminate man, haunted by the fear of death—a most unpagan weakness—and wholly absorbed in his passion for the lovely Lady Hostilia, the “Cynthia” of his Odes. “*Laus in amore mori*,” sang this poet-lover whose life-long passion, scholars have declared, overshadowed his genius. Sextus Aurelius Propertius died about the year B.C. 19, in the fortieth year of his age. But, if the gods vouchsafed to the lover of “Cynthia” only a brief span of existence, in compensation for the years withheld they dowered the poet with immortal fame.

When Christianity first came to be preached in Umbria, the Roman Empire was already declining. The fierce persecutions of the Christians under the two emperors, Maximus of Thrace and Diocletian, spread to every town and province in Italy, and two early bishops of Assisi, Saints Rufinus and Sabinus, were martyred for their faith.

Rufinus, steadfastly refusing to offer sacrifices to the false gods of Rome, was, by order of the Roman Prefect Aspasius, in A.D. 39, put to death by drowning in the mountain torrent Chiagio, at a spot near Castano, about four miles from Assisi. A few devoted disciples rescued the body of the holy bishop from the water, and for many long years its resting-place remained concealed.

St Sabinus, third bishop of Assisi, suffered under Venutius, prefect of Tuscany and Umbria. Sabinus, when refusing to offer incense to the gods, had taken up a sacred image

## *Assisi before St Francis*

much venerated by Venutius, and, dashing it to the ground, shattered it into a thousand fragments. This action infuriated the prefect, who commanded the hands of Sabinus to be struck off, after which the holy man was cast into a dungeon. But Sabinus from his prison worked wonders, encouraging and strengthening the faith of his disciples, and a legend relates how by a miracle he converted even his bitter enemy Venutius the Prefect, together with his wife and all his children. News of the conversion of Venutius was speedily conveyed to Rome, whereupon the low-born and bloodthirsty Emperor Maximus of Thrace immediately dispatched to Assisi Lucius, a trusty tribune, with orders to punish the new converts. Lucius seized Venutius, with his family, but finding that no persuasion on his part could avail to shake their faith, he commanded them first to be tortured and afterwards beheaded. This accomplished, the tribune then conveyed Sabinus from Assisi to Spoleto, where the saintly bishop was tortured and subsequently beaten to death with great cruelty.

But the Roman Empire was already in its death-throes. Sunk in corruption, in luxury and effeminacy, the great Mistress of the World proved powerless to repulse the invasions of the northern Barbarians, who, pouring in hordes across the Alps, devastated, and conquered, and exhausted unhappy Italy throughout the fifth and succeeding centuries. Assisi did not escape the scourge of the invaders, for in A.D. 545 it was besieged and taken by the Goths under King Totila. A few years later, Totila and his Goths were defeated by the Greeks, but there is no record of the part played by Assisi during the troubled period of transition that followed—when Italy was tossed to and fro, from Goth to Greek, and from Greek to German—for not before the Lombard conquest is the thread of Assisan history resumed. The new conquerors having divided Italy into different principalities, Assisi was included

## *Assisi of St Francis*

within the territories of the Dukedom of Spoleto. Under successive dukes, Spoleto developed into a state of considerable influence and importance, the first prince Feraldo and his immediate successors proving themselves fairly good and wise rulers. It was difficult, however, to maintain peace between the fiery Lombard princes, always apt to pick a quarrel with their neighbours and ready to fly to arms on the slightest provocation, regardless of the consequences to their subjects.

Among these princes none were more warlike than the Dukes of Spoleto, faithful allies of the Holy See, which was already rapidly attaining a position of great temporal power and importance. The popes had their own quarrels with the Lombard Kings, with whom they were in constant dispute concerning certain Provinces of the Romagna, which, as the Holy See alleged, the Lombards had wrongfully retained. Pope Adrian I at length appealed for assistance to Charlemagne, the King of the Franks, who willingly consented to march an army into Italy, ostensibly to regain for the Holy See these lost provinces. In the year 774, therefore, Charlemagne at the head of his troops invaded Italy to fight the battles of the Pope. On his march he paused to invest Assisi, and it was on this occasion that, as previously mentioned, the *Cloaca Maxima* played a conspicuous part. The Assisians were prepared stoutly to defend themselves, looking to it that their walls, ramparts, and bastions should be strongly fortified and well guarded. Unfortunately, they overlooked the ancient and neglected Roman drain, and Charlemagne's soldiers—recounts an old Chronicler—prowling one night beneath the city walls, stumbled upon the wide mouth of the *Cloaca Maxima*. Recognizing its possibilities, they hastened to report their discovery to the King. Swift to profit by the means thus offered to seize the city, Charlemagne commanded a small party of men-at-arms to effect

## *Assisi before St Francis*

an entrance by way of the old drain, which manœuvre they successfully accomplished without let or hindrance, first surprising and killing the sleeping sentinels, and afterwards opening the town gates. Thus Charlemagne and his army entered Assisi.

A terrible and bloody sack followed, the unfortunate citizens falling an easy prey to the savage soldiery; scarce a man, woman or child escaped alive, while their goods were pillaged and their houses burned to the ground. When Charlemagne at last commanded the butchery to cease, the unhappy city was reduced to a heap of smoking ruins. Before resuming his march to Rome, the conqueror tarried a few days in order to give instructions for the rebuilding of Assisi, and, records the old Chronicler, "when the new Assisi was completed, it was bestowed upon Christian folk"—which reflection, apparently, consoled the ancient writer for all past sufferings.

Charlemagne having thus bestowed Assisi upon Christian folk, some years of prosperity followed, for during the forty years' reign of the great Emperor, the city, in common with all Italy, enjoyed a respite from war and its attendant horrors of famine and pestilence. Under the sceptre of the Frankish King, Assisi still remained part of the Duchy of Spoleto, and was governed by a Count or *Castaldo* appointed by the Duke, who was assisted by the Bishop—the position of the latter in all local matters being one of great, and sometimes of wide, importance. The Carlovingian dynasty, however, was not destined to endure, and the deposition of Charles "le Gros," great-grandson of Charlemagne, gave the signal for a renewal of hostilities between Franks and Germans. After twenty years this struggle between the two great powers terminated with the complete ascendancy of the German arms.

The last of the Carlovingian Kings, Beringer II, defeated



## *Assisi of St Francis*

and helpless, was compelled to abdicate the Imperial crown in favour of Otho, King of Saxony, who, having exiled and imprisoned his rival in a German fortress, was immediately afterwards elected Emperor, and crowned in Rome as Otho I.



## CHAPTER II

# Assisi in the Eleventh Century

Di questa costa, là dov' ella frange  
più sua rattezza, nacque al mondo un sole,  
come fa questo talvolta di Gange.  
Però chi d' esso loco fa parole,  
non dica *Ascesi*, chè direbbe corto,  
ma *Oriente*, se proprio dir vuole.

*Paradiso*, xi, 49-54.

THE dawn of the eleventh century broke over an Italy dominated by strangers, yet struggling forward towards a national ideal, a dimly perceived vision of liberty which slowly crystallized round the person of the Pope. The German Emperor Otho I, surnamed "the Great," proved a wise and just ruler, deserving well of his Italian subjects for whose welfare he toiled. Unfortunately, however, for the country, the perpetual enmity that existed all through his reign between Otho and the Pope left a bitter legacy to Italy. The Guelph and Ghibelline wars, which paralysed and devastated medieval Italy, were the immediate and terrible consequences of the bad relations that existed between the Empire and the Holy See.

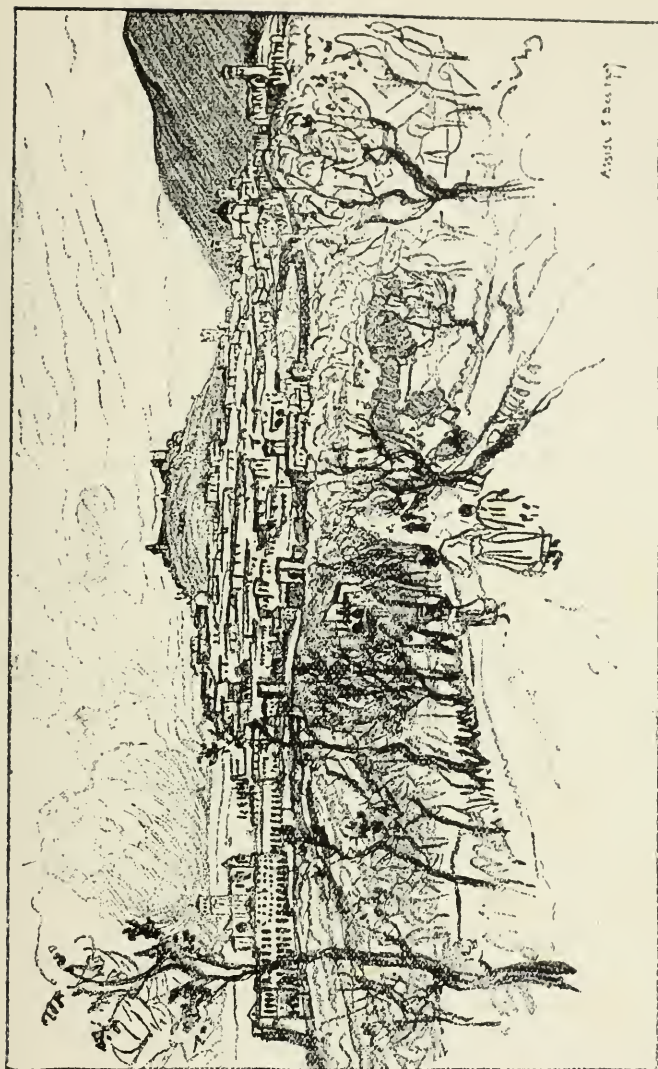
The troubled condition of the political atmosphere at this period proved no drawback to the development and growth of the city of Assisi, which was now prosperous and rapidly growing rich. The wealth of the nobles was steadily increasing, and with larger revenues they found themselves in a position to acquire land, on which to build great palaces, veritable fortresses, furnished with every means of defence in time of war. These formidable dwellings, surrounded by strong walls and lofty towers, were a perpetual menace to the already highly discontented "popolani," who cherished

## *Assisi of St Francis*

a bright dream of converting Assisi in the near future into a free Commune and thus securing their personal liberty.

It was at this period that the great monastic establishments first rose into prominence, for throughout Italy the Religious Orders were developing wealth, power, and political importance. Princes and nobles were their patrons and friends, rivalling each other in the munificence of their gifts of lands and money to abbeys and convents. Thus it came about that many abuses crept in as to the disposition of family property, the legal heirs being often deprived of their inheritance in favour of some particular monastery, of which the testator had in his lifetime been a benefactor or friend. The frequent occurrence of legacies in favour of religious establishments created an easily understood discontent among the people, who, looking with disapproval upon the grasping and worldly spirit prevalent among certain monastic communities, began almost to regard the religious with hostile eyes.

But great as was the power of the rich and warlike nobles and of the wealthy abbeys and monasteries, the power in the hands of the bishops was even greater, for in mediæval times the bishops played a considerable part in contemporary, as well as in local, politics. They distributed much patronage, and in all ecclesiastical cases dispensed justice in their own courts. From time to time also they were liable to be summoned to Rome to attend extra-Papal Councils, and many were employed by the Holy See on diplomatic missions to Italian and foreign courts. Surrounded with considerable state and accompanied by a numerous retinue of clerics, servants and men-at-arms, a bishop of the Middle Ages enjoyed, in right of his see, a position equal to that of a prince or of a powerful nobleman. And there is little doubt but that many of them were real and practical benefactors to their dioceses, for some of the finest cathedrals and churches, and many ancient charitable foundations in Italy, owe their beauty of



GENERAL VIEW OF ASSISI.

Assisi 8 Dec 1899



## *Assisi in the Eleventh Century*

form, their richness in architecture, their wealth in paintings and sculpture, to these same medieval bishops. In these respects Assisi resembles her sister cities in the debt she owes to her bishops, more especially to a prelate named Ugone, who occupied the see from 1024 to 1059.

The principal monuments still existing in Assisi, erected by Bishop Ugone, are the crypt and campanile of the cathedral church of S. Rufino, of which he was the founder. Being a man of deep and fervent piety, he desired most earnestly to provide a shrine worthy to hold the body of his martyred predecessor, St Rufinus, whose relics had hitherto been venerated in a small and humble oratory dating as far back as the fifth century. After his martyrdom the body of St Rufinus had been concealed until, persecution having ceased, the Christian community was permitted to deposit it in a chapel which stood outside Porta San Giacomo, on the site occupied by the present cemetery. A broad and pleasant road, running along the hill-side below the Rocca Maggiore, shaded by an avenue of sweet-scented acacia trees, now leads to the cemetery gates. Pursuing this road for a few paces the visitor is struck by the complete contrast existing between the landscape on this, the north side of the Rocca, and the luxuriant green of the Valley of Spoleto which he has just left behind him to the south. Far below the path on which he stands, the mountain torrent, Tescio, flows over its stony bed, surrounded by mountains bare of all vegetation, rocky, steep and unspeakably mournful and desolate. Their rugged forms sweep away to the horizon, grey and stern, and a deep silence seems to brood over the entire scene. South of the torrent the steep slope on which the citadel stands is deeply quarried, yielding the red limestone—*ammonitico rosso*—so largely used in the buildings of Assisi and the neighbourhood; while to the west, Monte San Rufino, crowned with the Rocca Minore, rises above the

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Porta Perlici and the groups of old houses lying just within the city walls. An ancient local tradition tells how the Chiagio once skirted the verdant foot of the cemetery hill, but when the body of St Rufinus was recovered, its waters retreated to the wild gorge beyond the sunny slope, through which they now flow to mingle with the Tescio in the plain beyond.

From the solitary chapel above the Tescio, the body of St Rufinus, enclosed within an ancient marble sarcophagus, was conveyed, in A.D. 1114, to another oratory, referred to by S. Pietro Damiano as Parva Basilica, close to the now ruined Roman mausoleum of the Piazza Nuova. The Christian bishop, Basil, must have chosen this site, then beyond the city walls, in obedience to the Roman authorities, whose law forbade the dead to be interred within the town. Here the holy body rested until the year 1028, when Bishop Ugone laid the first stone of his cathedral.

Before that date the cathedral of Assisi was only a very modest church, built by Bishop St Sabinus hard by a pagan temple, dedicated to Janus of the two faces—the god who, as all know, was believed to possess knowledge of past and future events. This church is now known as Sta Maria Maggiore, and stands on the Piazza Vescovado, being connected by means of a gallery with the Episcopal palace.

Bishop Ugone died in 1059, and his successor in the see of Assisi was a prelate named Agino, a man of greater political influence, but ambitious and avaricious. The esteem in which Bishop Agino was held outside his own diocese may be measured by the fact that he was summoned to Rome to attend the two Councils of Pope Nicholas II, in 1059 and 1066, and also to the Council presided over by Pope Alexander II. In the affairs of the Duchy of Spoleto Bishop Agino also played a conspicuous part, often advising and counselling Duke Godfrey, “the bearded,” the then reigning





ASSISI: THE ROCCA MINORE AND RUGGED SLOPES UNDER THE CITY WALLS, EAST TO NORTH





## *Assisi in the Eleventh Century*

prince; and it is interesting to recall that at an extraordinary Ducal Council held at Perugia in the year 1072, Bishop Agino of Assisi was present with Duke Godfrey's wife, the famous Countess Beatrice of Tuscany, who was accompanied by her yet more famous daughter, the Countess Matilda, the great champion of the Holy See.

Duke Godfrey, "the bearded," ruled his dominions well, but a time came when he determined to withdraw from Spoleto and retire alone to his German principality. This step was quickly followed by the departure of his wife and her daughter, who, abandoning the Umbrian Duchy, removed their Court to Tuscany, the paternal inheritance of Countess Matilda. The departure of the reigning family from Spoleto was the signal for an outburst of discord in every portion of the deserted State, and not long after the ducal banners had streamed away across the Umbrian mountains, Perugia and Assisi, the latter assisted by Todi and Foligno, became engaged in one of those small wars which were the curse of medieval Italy. This petty quarrel between Papal Perugia and Imperial Assisi may be regarded as the forerunner of those endless internecine wars which practically compose the medieval history of the Italian States, and continued until the two parties, Guelph and Ghibelline, ceased to exist. Tedious beyond words is the history of this lengthy and fluctuating warfare. The story of the Middle Ages in Italy is a catalogue of marches and counter-marches, battles and sieges, in which now the Papal and now the Imperial adherents prevailed. The country was ravaged by soldiery, pillaged by paid mercenaries; farmsteads and small villages, a sad spectacle of blackened ruins, stood among the waste fields on which the crops had been destroyed. In the cities all progress was at a standstill, the rival factions, dwelling side by side within the narrow limits of the walls, were perpetually on the watch for the slightest excuse on which

## *Assisi of St Francis*

to fly at one another's throats. Constant street fighting transformed the piazzas and narrow ways into hideous and bloody battlefields, for the ambitions and passions of men ran high in medieval Italy and were the cause of unspeakable sufferings endured by the poor and defenceless peasantry.

The peace that followed the victory won by the Lombard League at Legnano in 1176 checked for a time the Imperial power, and in Umbria its immediate consequence was the complete domination of the province by the city of Perugia. For some time past, Perugia had slowly acquired a position of power and importance, but the aims and ambitions of the Papal city were for a while frustrated by the expedition despatched into Italy by the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa in 1174. This expedition, which was intended to recapture the lost Imperial cities, was commanded by the Imperial Chancellor, Christian, bishop of Mentz. This warrior prelate entered Umbria with his troops, destroying and pillaging, and wherever he passed he left desolation, famine and pestilence in his wake. The Imperial army invested, captured and occupied Assisi, and its cherished dream of liberty and self-government being thus once more destroyed, the unhappy city was forced to taste all the bitterness of the Imperial yoke.

The surrender of Assisi to Christian of Mentz was shortly followed by the entrance into the city of the Emperor Frederic himself. Barbarossa took up his residence in the Rocca Maggiore, and, securely fortified within that stronghold, proceeded to reduce his reconquered and unhappy subjects to a state of complete subjection. His task accomplished, the Emperor handed over the city, with all its territories and dependencies, to his kinsman Conrad of Lutzen, a German prince whom he had newly created Duke of Spoleto.

Crushed and defeated, the national or Italian party was constrained to submit to the Imperial rule that prevailed

## *Assisi in the Eleventh Century*

until the spring of the year 1198, when Duke Conrad of Lutzen was summoned by the victorious Pope Innocent III to abdicate his duchy in favour of the Holy See.

Five years after the capture of Assisi by Frederic Barbarossa a child was born in that city who was destined to become one of the greatest figures in the world's history, a child, the lustre of whose name the sun of seven centuries has failed to dim. This child was the great St Francis of Assisi, upon whom the title "Seraphic Patriarch" has been deservedly bestowed by the Christian Church.\*

\*The terms "seraphic" and "cherubic" are employed in mystical theology, according to the divisions of the Celestial Hierarchy, to define the predominant distinguishing qualities of the saints. Thus the Seraphim burn with love, the Cherubim with light, and so, in their degree, human souls also are classed as seraphic or cherubic.

### CHAPTER III

## Pietro Bernardone's Son

Blessed is the rich that is found without blemish, and hath not gone after gold. Who is he? and we will call him blessed: for wonderful things hath he done among his people.

Who hath been tried thereby, and found perfect? then let him glory. Who might offend, and hath not offended? or done evil, and hath not done it? His goods shall be established, and the congregation shall declare his alms.—Ecclus xxxi, 8-11.

**P**IETRO BERNARDONE, cloth merchant, was a citizen of Assisi, and dwelt with his wife Pica in a house on the site of the present "Chiesa Nuova." In the eleventh and twelfth centuries merchants played a not unimportant part in the life around them. The Crusades had given a great impetus to commerce and industries, and the travelling merchant had grown to be a medium of international communication. The influence, wealth, and social importance of these traders were especially recognized in Italy, and in many towns they even enjoyed equal rank with *petite noblesse* of the period.

Commerce in Italy during the Middle Ages was largely carried on with the South of France, and who can say with what impatience citizens, villagers, and the noble proprietors of stern castles awaited the periodical visits of the travelling merchant? People of all classes looked forward to his arrival, not alone for the sake of his tempting wares, but also that they might learn what news he carried. His clients expected information, and perhaps some description of the recent events that rumour had possibly carried to their ears, and which they trusted the merchant's superior knowledge would either confirm or contradict. Travelling through Italy into France and back again, visiting the large cloth fairs where his goods found a market, and where he likewise

## *Pietro Bernardone's Son*

made purchases for his warehouse at home, Pietro Bernardone, like other members of his profession, yearly accomplished many arduous and perilous journeys. He travelled probably on horseback, riding along badly made and badly kept roads, traversing mountain passes which in places could only have been rough mule-tracks, and at the peril of his life fording rivers swollen by spring rains or lashed to fury by autumn storms. Yet other and greater dangers than the hostility of nature awaited the cloth merchant as he travelled through the country and along the lonely mountain roads. For, on unfrequented bypaths, and within the dense and vast forests then covering immense tracts of country, roamed bands of desperate outlaws, as well as gangs of common thieves, perpetually on the alert for any chance booty. And the rich merchant riding soberly astride his good horse, with a small escort of armed servants surrounding his pack mules laden with costly furs, bales of fine cloth, and other valuables, was as often as not forced to pay heavy toll as the price of permission to continue his road in peace.

Only scanty records exist concerning the parents of St Francis. All that is known about Bernardone himself is, that in his trade or "*arte*," to use the Italian expression of that day, he was successful, and that he amassed considerable wealth and material prosperity, which, as will be shown later on, encouraged within his breast the twin demons of avarice and ambition. It is probable that Pietro wooed and won his wife during some business journey, for Madonna Pica was not of Assisi, but of an ancient Provençal family. Such international marriages were not unusual at that period. Of their children, besides Francis, only one son, Angelo, a younger brother of the Saint, is mentioned in early biographies.

Pietro Bernardone was absent in France during the year 1182, when Francis his eldest son was born; and he was absent

## *Assisi of St Francis*

also at the baptism, when his child received the name of "Giovanni" or John. The infant was baptized in the ancient font at S. Rufino, where to this day Assisan babies, one and all, are brought to receive the same Holy Sacrament.

Many early legends have gathered round the birth and baptism of St Francis. One of the most interesting and beautiful among them recounts how, when returning home from S. Rufino, the nurse and child were overtaken by an aged pilgrim, who prayed that the infant might for one moment be placed in his arms.

The nurse complied with the old man's request, whereupon the pilgrim, receiving the child with every sign of joy, and embracing and blessing him, foretold his future greatness, the wonderful work he would accomplish for God, and the honour and reverence that his name would inspire in all men through the ages to come. With this the venerable pilgrim restored the infant to his nurse's arms, and quickly vanished. Filled with awe and amazement, those who assisted at this prophetic scene could not but see in the pilgrim an Angel of God.

When Pietro Bernardone returned to Assisi, he received with joy the tidings of his son's birth; and desiring, as it is said, to commemorate the fact of his absence in France at the time, he changed the infant's name from "Giovanni" to Francesco or Francis, "the Frenchman"—a name sufficiently uncommon in Italy at that time, but not unknown, as it exists in ancient documents of the eleventh and of the twelfth centuries.

The early years of Francis's life were steeped in luxury and self-indulgence, and his first biographer, Thomas of Celano, describes Pietro and Pica as the most indulgent of parents, surrounding their son with every comfort and with a superfluity of good things, "according to the vanity of this world." Continuing his account of the Bernardone household,



## *Pietro Bernardone's Son*

Celano draws a terrible picture of the corruption which threatened, at the period when Francis was born, to sap the very foundations of family life. He sternly accuses parents, and that in no polite terms, of corrupting their children's minds and morals from their tenderest years, and of encouraging their offspring, when arrived at riper age, in the practice of every description of wickedness, folly, and self-indulgence. This fearful indictment, it is interesting to remark, was somewhat moderated by Celano in his second life of the Saint. That such corruption should be possible is unpleasant to note, but the picture assists the student towards a better understanding of the early life of Francis and the licence of conduct that he displayed, a licence which was without doubt encouraged rather than checked by his father.

Francis received his earliest education from the Canons of S. Giorgio, whose simple church and house, now replaced by the mother convent of the Poor Clares, stood hard by the Porta Nuova. From these excellent priests the boy learned reading, writing and the rudiments of Latin. His knowledge of the French language, upon his familiarity with which his early biographers are all agreed, must have been acquired from Madonna Pica, for from his earliest to his latest hour he loved his mother's soft Provençal tongue, and often spoke it, and sang hymns in French. "The Three Companions," referring to one of the many journeys undertaken by the Saint to the Marches of Ancona—an occasion on which he was accompanied by the Blessed Giles of Assisi—write, "The holy man sang praises in French with a voice loud and clear"; and several references of the same nature occur throughout the early biographies. Francis could not have remained long with the Canons of S. Giorgio, for he was still but a youth when his father took him into his business and initiated him into the mysteries of the paternal "arte," remarking with fatherly pride the great aptitude that Fran-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

cis displayed for business, and indulging high hopes for the future prosperity of the house of Bernardone, when the time should come for the son to fill his father's place. "Francis, however," say "The Three Companions," "practised his father's art in far other fashion, for he was a merrier man than was his father and more generous, given unto jests and songs, and most free-handed in spending, insomuch that he spent all his havings and his profits in banquets and other matters." His parents, indulgent as they were, appear nevertheless to have found from time to time occasion to rebuke Francis for his extravagances, but their censure was inspired by worldly anxieties alone, for they complained that "he seemed no son of theirs, but rather of some mighty prince," so lavish and magnificent were the young man's habits. The citizens of Assisi appear to have regarded with displeasure the gay and prodigal life of this splendid son of the cloth merchant, and often would the gossips carry tales of the doings and the extravagant pastimes of her son to Pica, who would listen and make answer: "What think ye of my son? He shall yet be the son of God by grace." Madonna Pica is but a shadowy figure moving across the stage of her son's early life, and little is recounted of her save that she was honest, simple and virtuous, and that she loved Francis above her other son. These facts, together with the part that she afterwards played when Bernardone, blinded by anger and the smart of thwarted ambition, treated his son with great harshness and cruelty, are all that history has found to recall of the Saint's mother. Both parents disappear early from the story of St Francis, and it is a remarkable feature in the history of his life that from the date of his final conversion to the day of his death neither Bernardone nor Pica, nor indeed any member of his family, again figures in the narrative.

Francis, meanwhile, worked steadily at his father's trade as a cloth merchant, and, according to custom, began at a



## *Pietro Bernardone's Son*

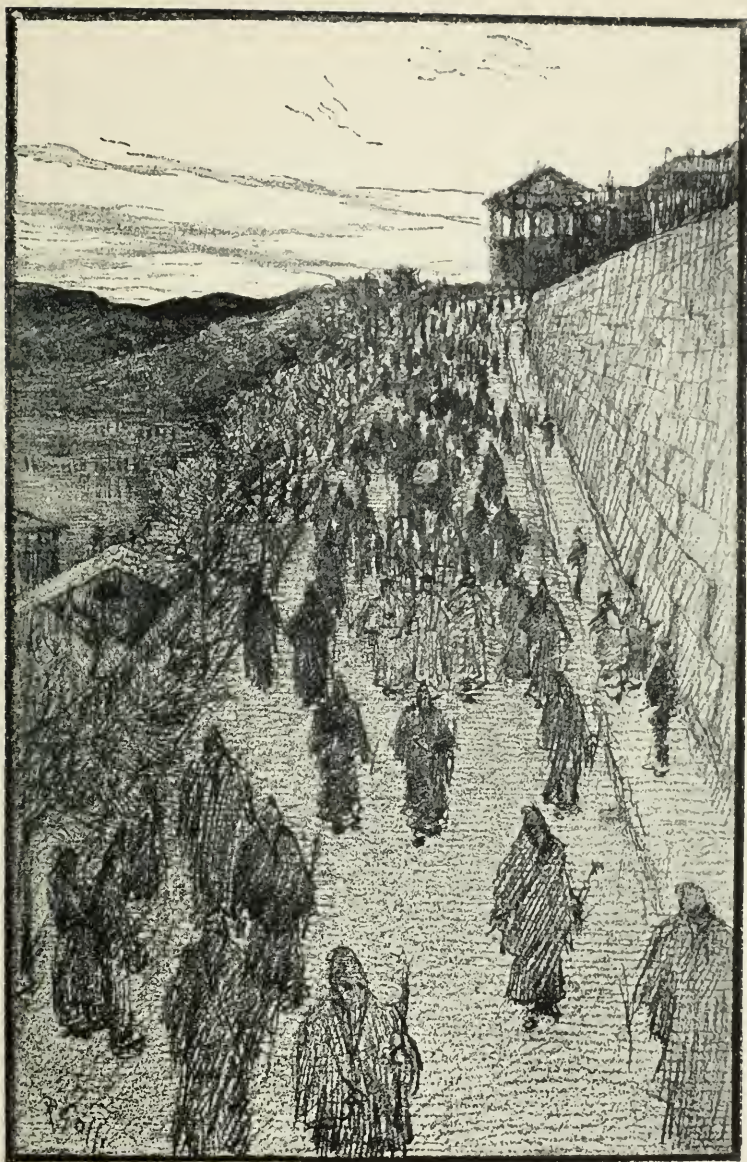
certain age to earn money on his own account. Maybe he was even given a small share of his father's profits, or perhaps some such contract as might correspond to a modern partnership was concluded between Bernardone and his son. However that may have been, Francis evidently worked hard in the warehouse, the ancient and carved portal of which may still be seen intact; but when once released from business cares he continued to indulge in dissipation and folly, for, says Thomas of Celano quaintly, "he was ever enticed by the venom of the old serpent." Chosen as leader by the wildest spirits in Assisi, the organizer of every feast and party of pleasure, Francis enjoyed among his companions greater popularity than any youth of them all. His courteous and gentle manners, his kindness of heart, combined with that wonderful personal attraction which even now is felt and recognized across the gulf of centuries, won for him the affection and the sympathy of all who came in contact with him. It is a point to be noted that the age of St Francis was the age of chivalry, the flowering-time of the French troubadours, those minstrels of chivalry and love, the inventors of jousts and of tourneys, of the Ideal Liege Lady and of the Court of Love. The Italy of the twelfth century welcomed those sweet singers, the "Trouvères" of Provence, with open arms, and four of their number, the greatest and most famous of all, namely, Bernard de Ventadour, Cadinet, Raimbaud de Vaquers and Pierre Vidal, were at the beginning of the century honoured guests at one or other of the Italian Courts.

The troubadours' tales and songs had been caught up by the people, and flew from mouth to mouth and from ear to ear, travelling through the length and breadth of the land, even as to this day a popular melody will follow the traveller in Italy from one town to another. News of knightly feats of arms, of "Carousels" and romantic "Courts of Love,"

## *Assisi of St Francis*

penetrated even to the then small and unimportant city of Assisi, inflaming the imagination of its youthful citizens, who straightway fell to dreaming dreams of future fame, glory and love. In Umbria, that birthplace of beautiful colour, of suave and poetical art, where the eye at the present day is delighted by many a picturesque and brilliantly coloured religious procession winding its way with painted banners and lighted candles through medieval streets, these tales of the troubadours and their doings were quick to arouse sympathy and appreciation, exciting in the minds of the younger men a desire to emulate the knightly deeds of which the troubadours then sang. Well might the youthful Francis, with the inborn temperament of a poet, absorb the songs and tales of the minstrels, feeding upon them, and encouraging in his heart visions of beauty and grandeur, of glory and of fame, which were but the natural results of such romance.

With increasing zest he sought the pleasures offered by the banquets, games and revels which followed each other in rapid succession, and the merchant's son went abroad in costly garments, displaying more exquisite contrasts of colour and more fastidious taste than any of his companions, who were chiefly noble scions of the richest and most important families of Assisi. His biographers are careful to point out that, although he was admired and envied, and indulged by his fond father in every wish and caprice, Francis was never entirely absorbed in the passing hour. Deep in his heart the Spirit of God was stirring, and "signs were not lacking," writes St Bonaventura, "clearly betokening the abundant outpouring of the Divine blessing reserved for him in days to come." The chief among these tokens was the intense and, again to quote St Bonaventura, "natural love of Christ's poor," manifested by St Francis even in those early days, when, outwardly, he appeared to be entirely absorbed in the business and passing vanities of this world. One day Francis,



A PROCESSION OF MONKS: PERUGIA.



## *Pietro Bernardone's Son*

being petitioned by a beggar for alms in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, drove the poor man away from his warehouse door with angry words. Suddenly, as the mendicant turned away, the young man's conscience awoke and smote him, whereupon, repenting him of his action, its harshness and lack of charity, he resolved never again to refuse any one who begged an alms in the name of the King of Heaven. To this resolution he ever held and would give away, not money only, but his very garments to Christ's poor; and, "Albeit," write "The Three Companions," "he were merchant, yet was he a most prodigal dispenser of this world's riches—no needy man or woman begged of him in vain," while ever within his soul silently and secretly grew and increased that great love of poverty which was destined hereafter to bear such holy and abundant fruit. Love for his poor brethren was the visible sign of God's grace working in His future servant, and St Bonaventura at the same time records the following mystical homage to his future greatness:

"A certain man," writes the Seraphic Doctor, "of great simplicity, dwelt in those days in Assisi, who by virtue and knowledge divinely infused, whenever he met Francis in the streets would take off his mantle and spread it upon the ground before him, declaring that he did so because he was a man worthy of all reverence, who would shortly perform great works and marvellous deeds, and was therefore to be highly honoured and praised by all faithful Christians." How must St Francis have wondered what such sign might portend, when, daily walking through the long, steep streets of Assisi, he received the homage of the poor simpleton! Doubtless he frequently mused in spirit, but for the time God's Will remained unrevealed, and glamour, born of the absorbing tales of chivalry, enveloped his spirit. All his dreams as to the future were crowded with knightly quests and

## *Assisi of St Francis*

feats of arms and the thirsting for worldly fame, while his imagination was dazzled by visions of riches, happiness and prosperity. He longed to be transformed into some great prince, and waited eagerly for an opportunity to serve beneath the banner of an earthly king, and to go forth to fight and win his spurs upon a stricken field.





VIA ANTONIO SERMALLI: ASSISI





## CHAPTER IV

# The Parting of the Ways

Questa, privata del primo marito,  
mille e cent' anni e più dispetta e scura  
fino a costui si stette senza invito.

*Paradiso*, xi, 64-67.

**T**HE great movement in Italy towards enfranchisement developed in purpose and strength towards the end of the twelfth century. As years went by, and the sufferings of the people increased, hatred of the foreigner and his tyrannical yoke became intensified, and within the breasts of men and women there deepened the firm resolve to strive for freedom and self-government.

The Republican ideal, longed for and cherished by hundreds of honest law-abiding Umbrians, found no favour in the eyes of the great feudal nobles, who, impoverished by the Crusades, for the furtherance of which they had supplied large sums of money, were endeavouring by all the means in their power to replenish their exhausted coffers. To compass this end they exacted heavier dues and more iniquitous taxes than ever before from their suffering vassals, grinding down the starving and miserable peasantry, ravaged by pestilence and more than half ruined by the petty wars that were constantly occurring throughout the country. Already, in defiance of alien oppressors and rapacious nobles, many of the more important towns were beginning to form themselves into free and independent Republics or Communes. Assisi, encouraged by its neighbours, resolved to follow their example, and elected Consuls from among her citizens with the primary object of protecting and defending the material interests and independence of the Assisan people. Alarmed by this first step towards a free Commune, Duke Conrad of Spoleto, Count of Assisi, promptly forbade the election,

## *Assisi of St Francis*

but found himself powerless to enforce his prohibition. Discontent with Duke Conrad's rule was increasing in Assisi, and at length, in the year 1200, the long smouldering hostility towards his person and government broke out into fierce and open revolt. The citizens flew to arms and boldly attacked the "Rocca," which was held in the Duke's name. Spurred on by the sting of their many grievances, they swarmed up the stony mountain side, and reaching the hill by precipitous paths, furiously assaulted the formidable citadel on the summit. The attack was successful; the Rocca was captured and demolished, its massive walls and towers totally destroyed, and not one stone upon another remained to mark the spot where the Duke's stronghold had once stood. Flushed by this first victory in the cause of liberty, the Assisians proceeded—after refortifying the town, and constructing strong walls, ramparts, and towers round about it—to turn their arms against the nobles. These defended themselves as best they could from within their fortified palaces and castles, but after a year's struggle the advantage finally rested with the people.

Exasperated by this failure in resisting the despised "popolani," the nobles at length secretly appealed to Perugia for assistance. Ever on the alert to benefit by internal disputes amongst their neighbours, the Perugians willingly consented to provide the Assisan patricians with men-at-arms, but only on condition that, if victorious, the nobles should recognize the suzerainty of Perugia, a condition which they accepted without demur. Furious at this new development, the Assisians rallied all their available forces, and prepared to the last man to resist their hereditary foe. Meeting the Perugian troops in battle in the wide Valley of Spoleto, at a spot traditionally identified with the present Ponte San Giovanni, the Assisan forces were completely defeated in (it is said) the year 1201. At this period St Francis was a youth of twenty years of age. Whether he assisted in the destruction of the "Rocca" or



ASSISI: THE ROCCA MAGGIORE



## *The Parting of the Ways*

joined his fellow citizens in their war upon the nobles, is uncertain; but when these latter offered his beloved Assisi as a prey to Perugia, the merchant's son abandoned at the call of patriotism his business, his luxuries and his amusements, and fought bravely for his country, marching side by side with the youthful companions of his banquets and revels, beneath the lion standard of Assisi.

Unfortunately, this venerated banner floated above an army of raw recruits, for such indeed were these citizens of Assisi who rushed stormily down the stony mountain-side and across the plain, eager to meet the advancing foe, whom they could discern moving slowly in the direction of their city; but defeat awaited them when the long evening shadows swept across the broad Valley of Spoleto, enveloping Ponte San Giovanni in a grey mantle of dusk, the day was lost, and Francis, among many others, was taken by the enemy. "For," so write the "Three Companions," "Francis was taken prisoner with many of his fellow citizens and held in captivity with them in Perugia. Yet, for that he was noble in his manners, he was imprisoned in company with the knights"—a privilege not in strict accordance with the customs of the time.

How endlessly long the days must have seemed to the brave youths whom the fortune of war had thus cast within the gloomy walls of a Perugian prison! Miserably indeed must they have fared. Many were sunk in deep despondency; but not so Francis, whose happy nature, rising above his evil plight, soared beyond the prison bars and dungeon walls. Hard fare proved powerless to quench the joyousness that dwelt within him, a very gift from Heaven, and his bright spirit refused to be overcast or discouraged. Undismayed by dark surroundings, it was Francis who kept the peace between his hot-headed fellow-captives, and he would even from time to time jest with his companions in misfor-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

tune, thus causing some displeasure to at least one of them, who testily remarked: "It was like a madman to rejoice, seeing how they were set in prison." Unto whom Francis made answer in a loud voice: "What think ye of me? I shall be worshipped by the whole world."\* For one long year the prisoners were detained, until peace was again concluded between Assisi and Perugia. When that happy event took place Francis and his comrades were released, and speedily returned to their homes.

The terms of peace arranged between Perugia and Assisi were immediately followed by a contract drawn up between the "buoni uomini" or patricians and the "uomini del popolo" or plebeians of Assisi, which contract, when the articles were finally agreed upon, was solemnly ratified in the cathedral of S. Rufino. It is quite possible that St Francis was present at what must have been an impressive ceremony, when the Assisians of all ranks and classes, rich and poor, merchant and peasant, met in the cathedral, and there before the High Altar swore a solemn oath to abide by a contract that promised future peace and prosperity to the exhausted city. For some considerable period tranquillity did actually reign, and Assisi rested and was prosperous.

Having returned to his father's warehouse, Francis threw himself, with all the zest engendered by long absence, into his old life of work and pleasure. As heretofore, his aptitude for business seems in no way to have interfered with the joyous disposition which, having placed him at the head of the gay band of pleasure-seekers, continued to constitute him presiding genius at the banquets and festivals that his friends perpetually called upon him to organize or invent.

But quite unexpectedly this life of mingled money-making and pleasure was to receive a rude check. A severe attack of illness stretched Francis on a bed of suffering, where he lay

\* *Legend of the Three Companions.*



## *The Parting of the Ways*

for many weeks, not knowing whether he were to live or die. Through the mercy of God, however, and for the fulfilment of His purposes, Francis recovered; but being much weakened by fever, his convalescence proved tedious, and health and strength returned but gradually. In his weakness the deep depression which so constantly accompanies recovery from sickness laid its hand upon him, and, as the long days passed slowly by, his sadness was intensified by a troubled conviction that some inward change, not definable but unmistakable, and of a kind which he could confide to no one, had taken place within his soul. Later, as he crept about the house supporting with a stick his feeble steps, he gradually realized that he had risen from his sick-bed a different man—that he was no longer the same Francis who had been struck down by fever so many weeks before.

On a lovely spring morning, Francis, still leaning upon his staff, went forth into the streets, intending to gain some point upon the city walls whence he might gaze over the beautiful prospect of mountain and valley that surrounds Assisi—a scene his heart loved well and of the sight of which he had been for so many weeks deprived. But this spell, perhaps one which Francis had woven many times before, now failed to cheer him. The tender lilac-tinted mountains melting into the spring verdure of woods and fields, the virginal blue depths of the domed sky, the chime of church bells floating across the still air—all alike were powerless to charm away the melancholy that overwhelmed him. From the dim shadows of the valley of death he had emerged only to realize the terrible emptiness of a world without God. The mental contemplation of his fellow-beings labouring only for worldly wealth and possessions filled this new Francis with profound disgust. And yet, what else had he himself hitherto desired? He gazed across the smiling valley with mournful eyes, his soul filled with grief for the pain and sorrow of the

## *Assisi of St Francis*

world, and he could find no comfort. "For," writes Thomas of Celano, when recalling this scene, "neither did the delight-someness of vineyards or other pleasant sights serve by any means to afford him consolation. He marvelled at the sudden change within himself, for he already despised the love of earthly things; they were to him but foolishness. From that hour he began to hold in despite, and to despise, all those things which heretofore he had held in love and admiration, but not, however, wholly and perfectly, for as yet he was not free of the bonds of vanity, neither had he shaken from about his neck the yoke of this world's miserable servitude."

Sick at heart, Francis turned away from the fair prospect of valley and plain, and sorrowfully retraced the road to his father's house.

The freshness of the revelation left him like a man groping in the dark, who has been bidden to search for light, but knows not in what direction to begin his quest. He was as one knowing that there is a road that he ought to tread, but unable to find either the right gate or the path leading to his destination. In his perplexity the old visions returned to haunt him, and he fell once more to dreaming of military fame and glory.

With renewed bodily strength and with a mind regenerated, Francis returned to his daily occupations, and to the zealous succour of the poor, the sick and the needy. "At this time," recounts St Bonaventura, "going forth one day, as was his wont, in apparel suited to his state, he met a certain soldier of honour and courage, but poorly and vilely clad, of whose poverty feeling a tender and sorrowful compassion, he took off his new clothes and gave them to the poor man-at-arms, thus at once fulfilling two offices of piety, by covering the shame of a noble cavalier and relieving a poor man's penury. On the following night," continues the Seraphic



PERUGIA: THE DUOMO, WITH THE OPEN-AIR PULPIT  
AND BRONZE STATUE OF POPE JULIUS II



## *The Parting of the Ways*

Doctor, "when he was asleep the Divine mercy showed him a spacious and beautiful palace filled with arms and military ensigns, all marked with the Cross of Christ, to make known to him that his charitable deed done to the poor soldier for the love of the great King of Heaven should receive an unspeakable reward. And when he asked for whom all these things were reserved, a Divine voice answered him that they were for him and for his soldiers."

Numerous men-at-arms, companions of the soldier whom St Francis relieved, were at that period wandering over Umbria and other parts of Italy, the greater number penniless and homeless, miserable and helpless, human flotsam and jetsam cast up from the great rival camps of the Pope and the Emperor. For political strife was again distracting Italy, and Walter de Brienne, the flower of French chivalry—"le gentil Conte" of the old Chronicles—was defending the Holy See in Apulia. Men were flocking to the Papal standard, and among the numerous Italian noblemen who were everywhere raising troops to reinforce de Brienne's army was one Conte Gentile of Assisi. Francis, absorbed in contemplation of the military glory which he believed to have been promised him in his recent vision of the rich palace, seized upon what appeared a propitious opportunity for gratifying his ambition, and determined to join the followers of Conte Gentile. His services were readily accepted, and he joyfully flung himself into the necessary preparations for an expedition which he hoped and believed would bring the fulfilment of his heart's desires.

Bernardone, nothing loth, willingly furnished his son with the necessary accoutrements, and so magnificent was the equipment he provided that it excited the envious comments of his fellow-citizens, accustomed though they were to the young merchant's well-known extravagances. With heart beating high with delightful anticipation, and hope and

## *Assisi of St Francis*

confidence beaming in his eyes, Francis rode out of the city gates in Conte Gentile's train, participating in the acclamations and good wishes of the crowd who bade God-speed to de Brienne's recruits. That same night the little troop halted in Spoleto, where, a sudden indisposition having seized upon Francis, his companions were forced to leave him behind when on the following morning they resumed their journey towards Apulia. Abandoned by his friends, Francis lay on his bed burning with a fever which was aggravated by overwhelming and bitter disappointment. The high hopes he had cherished were cruelly shattered, and the bright visions which had lured him with promises of a golden future seemed now to mock and gibe at him through the long night-watches.

During those weary hours at the little inn, the future must indeed have seemed to him almost without hope; but as the fever diminished, and his strength returned, the problem of the future, so rudely shattered by the failure to proceed with Conte Gentile, had to be considered.

"One night, feeling already somewhat better, as he slept," writes St Bonaventura, "the Lord spoke to him with the voice of a friend, saying: 'Francis, who can do most for thee, the Lord or the servant, the rich man or the poor?' And when Francis replied that the Lord and the rich man could do more for him than the poor: 'Wherefore,' then said the voice, 'dost thou leave the Lord for the servant, and the God of infinite riches for a poor mortal?' Then said Francis: 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' And the Lord answered: 'Return home, for the vision that thou hast seen prefigures a spiritual work which thou shalt bring to pass, not by human counsel, but by Divine disposition.'" When morning dawned, Francis, though still weak in body, prepared immediately to obey the Divine voice. Not for one moment did he doubt that the message he had received



## *The Parting of the Ways*

came from heaven; and as he rode in the pearly light of morning along the white road that leads from Spoleto to Assisi, between the grey-green olive gardens and the fields of yellowing maize, his heart must have been very full. Long and prayerfully did he meditate upon the words spoken to him by the heavenly voice, seeking earnestly and with great fervour to understand their import, and so absorbed was he in this meditation that he never heeded the surprised and generally unfavourable comments evoked by his unlooked-for return to Assisi. For, while he lay in the inn at Spoleto, the young man's eyes had at last been opened by the grace of God, his face was now set towards divine things, and thoughts of this world were fading away, soon to pass from him for ever.

Although Francis was inwardly conscious of his change of heart, the little world of Assisi perceived no alteration in his daily manner or speech. His gay comrades had welcomed the return of their favourite with every sign of delight and satisfaction, and soon after his arrival from Spoleto they once more persuaded him to organize a feast and unanimously elected him "Master of the Revels." On the appointed evening a sumptuous banquet awaited the gay company. They feasted late, and, rising at last from the table, started forth, as was their custom, to patrol the city, singing and dancing through the streets in fantastic fashion, and no doubt causing much disturbance to many peaceful citizens by this nightly revel. Carrying in his hand a white wand, the symbol of his office as "Master of the Revels," Francis lingered behind, following in the rear of the joyous band which filled the narrow streets with lively songs and laughing jests, "When lo!" recount the "Three Companions," "on a sudden he is visited of the Lord." In that strange scene, in that unwonted hour, the Holy Spirit descends upon Francis, and so sweet is the visitation of his Lord "that he



## *Assisi of St Francis*

can neither speak nor move, nor is he able to feel or hear aught save that Sweetness only." His comrades, missing his voice from the chorus and his steps from the dance—for was not Francis ever the heart and soul of all their merry revels?—looked back and saw him standing as it might be rooted to the spot, rapt in spirit and deaf to their cries and gestures. Hurrying towards him, with an inquiry as to what ailed him, they laughingly taxed Francis with contemplating the taking to himself of a wife. To this he replied with a loud voice: "Truly have ye spoken, for that I thought of taking unto me a wife nobler, and richer, and fairer than ever ye have seen."\*

Even thus was the way pointed out and the choice made. In the precipitous street, beneath the clear night sky, the prayed-for revelation was vouchsafed, and in his vocation Francis found his Bride. And now, through the future years, God's Will was to be his will, and his chosen bride, chosen from out of all the world, she whom he desired to espouse for the love of Jesus Christ and true religion, would be the "Lady Poverty"—Poverty widowed and despised, neglected and shunned.

Questa, privata del primo marito  
mille e cent' anni e più dispetta e scura  
fino a costui si stette senza invito.†

Of her just spouse bereaved a thousand were,  
And more the years she lived, despised, obscure,  
And till he came, none did his suit prefer.‡

"The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come,'" and Francis, joyfully responding to the heavenly call, "most devoutly besought the Divine clemency to make manifest that which he should do."§

\* *Legend of the Three Companions.* † *Paradiso*, xi, 64-67.

‡ Dean Plumtre's translation. § *S. Bonaventura, Life of St Francis of Assisi.*

## CHAPTER V

# The Search after Righteousness

Chè per tal donna giovinetto in guerra  
del padre corse, . . .  
ed innanzi alla sua spirital corte,  
*et coram patre* le sì fece unito.

*Paradiso*, xi, 58-59, 61-62.

THE Divine visitation recorded in the preceding chapter was not followed immediately by the religious life. Francis had found his vocation, and henceforward he was to be the servant of God; but his separation from the world was only to be gradually accomplished, and the events that were about to take place were destined to lead him gently, step by step, to the goal of supreme renunciation. Writing of this period St Bonaventura points out, in noteworthy words, "He had neither master nor teacher to guide and instruct him, save only Christ our Lord."\*

Meanwhile, still occupied with his "Arte," and riding about the country for recreation, his life outwardly proceeded in much the same manner as heretofore. Yet there was one great and marked difference, that whereas in former days he would during his leisure hours seek the companionship of gay and careless associates, he now deserted them, preferring long and solitary rambles, during which he doubtless meditated deeply on God's mysterious dealings with mankind. On these occasions he would sometimes ascend the steep slopes of Monte Subasio, attaining the high green plateaux, bright and jewelled in the springtime with innumerable varieties of wild flowers, and at other times he would penetrate into the lonely gorges and rocky ravines, where, secluded in their secret depths, his spirit, undisturbed, could hold sweet con-

\* *Life of St Francis.*

## *Assisi of St Francis*

verse with the Lord. "He knew" writes St Bonaventura, "that he had found the hidden treasure, but he knew not yet how he was to purchase it; only, it seemed to be made known to him that the spiritual merchant must begin with contempt of the world."

The struggle between the new nature and the old was slow and painful, beset by constant allurements and temptations to turn back to the old and careless life, and to relinquish the thorny path of penitence and self-denial. Valiantly Francis combatted his fastidiousness and his pride, wrestling with the spiritual weapons of prayer and fasting, disciplining his senses and inclinations; and as his love for Him who was "despised and rejected of men" increased, so grew his love for the poor, whom he began to visit and care for, while also supplying the wants and necessities of many poor churches and poor priests in their mean and squalid dwellings. Thus did his days pass by until the end of the year 1204, when a memorable event in the young man's life occurred—his first visit to Rome. It was in the garb of a pilgrim that Francis entered the Eternal City and knelt among the faithful gathered around the tomb of the Holy Apostles in the great cathedral of St Peter. Before his eyes passed an ever moving stream of people of varied nationalities who had come to worship at this the central shrine of Christendom. Many in this multitude carried gifts and offerings which, to the fervent Assisan youth, as he stood watching, appeared poor and niggardly and wholly unworthy of the sanctity of the spot they proposed to honour. "Since," said Francis within himself, "the Prince of the Apostles should of right be magnificently honoured, why do these folk make such sorry offerings to the church wherein his body rests?" "And so in great fervency of spirit he put his hand into his purse, drew it forth full of money, and flung it through the grating of the shrine with such a crash that all they who

## *The Search after Righteousness*

were standing by did greatly marvel at so splendid an oblation.”\*

In those days the flight of steps leading to the entrance doors of the old cathedral of S. Pietro in Vaticano was much encumbered by crowds of beggars, generally dependent on the charity of the faithful and on the alms bestowed by the bands of pilgrims constantly pouring into Rome. As Francis stood observing with pity these poor wretches, he was seized by a sudden saintly impulse to taste and share their misery, and so, borrowing the sorry rags of one among them, he stood during the long remaining hours of that memorable day, as though himself a member of the brotherhood of wretchedness, begging from the passers by, not in his own but in the French tongue. When night fell he returned to his lodging, and this incident may be considered the first act of voluntary mendicancy performed by “Christ’s Poor Man.”

The pilgrimage to Rome terminated, Francis returned to Assisi and resumed his ordinary life, now, however, to be led under new and greater difficulties. The increasing hostility displayed by Bernardone to the pious ideals and aspirations of his son began to fill Francis with dismay. Hitherto he had encountered little opposition from his father, either to his own wishes or to his requests for money—money that in past days he had squandered in pleasure and amusements. But now, when he needed it for the Church and for the poor, Bernardone roughly refused assistance, and daily the relations between father and son grew more estranged, while Francis, uncertain as to the future, yet awaited the complete revelation of the Divine Will. Day by day his spiritual life deepened and intensified, earthly vanities ceased entirely to attract him, and he desired only to know “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” During long hours he meditated upon

\* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

## *Assisi of St Francis*

the sorrowful sacrifice of the Cross, shedding abundant tears while he contemplated the sufferings of his Redeemer, and, as the flame of heavenly love burned daily stronger and brighter, so did he strive with greater earnestness entirely to subdue his will to the will of God, in perfect obedience to the promptings of grace. "For," remarks St Bonaventura, "the soldier of Christ must begin by vanquishing himself."

One such touching victory the saintly Doctor has preserved in his narrative of the life of St Francis, describing it in the following simple yet eloquent words:

"Now, as he rode one day over the plain of Assisi, he met a leper whose sudden appearance filled him with fear and horror; but forthwith calling to mind the resolution he had made to follow after perfection, and remembering that if he would be a soldier of Christ he must first overcome himself, he dismounted from his horse and went to meet the leper that he might embrace him; and when the poor man stretched out his hand to receive an alms, he kissed it, and filled it with money. Having again mounted his horse, he looked around him over the wide and open plain, but nowhere could he see the leper; upon which, being filled with wonder and joy, he began devoutly to give thanks to God, purposing within himself to proceed to still greater things than this."

Greater things were to be accomplished, and greater things did indeed follow, as he drew nearer and nearer to the hour of his perfect conversion.

In memory of that miraculous meeting with the leper in the plain, that supreme moment when Divine Love stood in his path and would not be denied, the heart of Francis melted towards the unhappy sufferers from that terrible plague, and he determined to seek them out at the "Lazaretto," or leper settlement, then, as it is believed, situated at Rivo Torto. The prevalence of leprosy in those days made the isolation of lepers an imperative necessity, and the un-



ASSISI FROM RIVO TORTO







## *The Search after Righteousness*

fortunate creatures stricken by the dread disease generally found themselves neglected and abandoned in their miserable dwelling-places. To these poor outcasts of the lazaret-house the coming of St Francis must indeed have been welcome as the advent of an angel of God, and their gratitude to him and their affection for him knew no bounds.\* Father Paschal Robinson, the well-known Franciscan writer, points to these early ministrations of Francis among the lepers as the beginning of a new era in his spiritual life; and writing of this period, the Saint himself says: "The Lord gave to me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance, for when I was in sin it seemed to me very bitter to see lepers, and the Lord Himself led me amongst them, and I showed mercy to them. And when I had left them, that which seemed to me bitter was changed for me into sweetness of body and soul. And afterwards I remained a little and I left the world."†

At this period Francis would often be accompanied in his customary rambles over the country-side by a certain friend whose personality remains unknown, but who listened willingly to his discourse. "I have found a great treasure," Francis would exclaim repeatedly as they proceeded side by side, and he would eagerly lead the way to a secluded cave, the exact position of which is now uncertain, and while his friend watched without he would enter there to pray alone. When after long hours Francis reappeared he seemed in the eyes of his friend to be a new man, for "his countenance shone with unearthly beauty, dazzling the beholder, and it seemed to him as though Francis, when he came forth, was no longer the same man whom he had lately beheld entering the cavern."

One day, when Francis was walking alone among the

\* See *Writings of St Francis*, by Father Paschal Robinson.

† *Testament of St Francis*, translated by Father P. Robinson.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

fields, all absorbed in holy meditation, his steps unconsciously brought him to a spot where stood a half-ruined and deserted church, dedicated to S. Damiano.

This interesting church—at a later date closely associated with both St Francis and St Clare, “blotti au pied de quelques oliviers, comme une alouette au pied des genêts,” to quote Monsieur Paul Sabatier’s poetical description—stands on a lower slope of the hills beneath the Porta Nuova, forming, as it were, a link between the convent of Sta Chiara, high within the city walls, and the basilica of Sta Maria degli Angeli in the plain below.

The visitor, standing among the terraced olive gardens that surround the little sanctuary, sees to the north the solemn towers of Assisi, belfry and dome and arched gateway, outlined against the sky, while to the south far as the eye can reach lies the vast plain sometimes laughing in the golden sunshine, or sombre in the first blast of a summer storm.

At the time when Francis first visited the little church it was completely neglected and abandoned except for the poor priest in charge, and although dependent upon the Chapter of the Cathedral of S. Rufino it had been permitted to fall into a sad condition of ruin and decay, so sad indeed that it must have struck Francis very painfully as he approached the door. The interior was no less neglected and forlorn, yet above the altar hung a Byzantine crucifix such as Giunta Pisano and Margaritone loved to paint, and before this crucifix Francis prostrated himself in the lonely calm of the deserted church.

And while he poured forth his soul in prayer and supplication to the crucified Lord, there spoke a Voice from the Cross, saying: “Francis, seest thou not that My House is being destroyed? Go, therefore, and repair it for Me.” Then Francis, trembling and full of fear, being in the church



ASSISI: THE CHURCH AND CONVENT OF S. CHIARA



## *The Search after Righteousness*

alone, wondered at the sound of that marvellous voice, and he replied, very humbly and meekly, "Most gladly, O Lord," and for a long time he remained speechless and motionless.\* After a while his mind became composed, and he rose prepared without hesitation to obey the command conveyed by the Divine Voice. His first care, however, was for the miraculous crucifix, and therefore before leaving S. Damiano he sought out the priest, and, giving him all the money he had with him, desired of him that he should purchase sufficient oil wherewith to keep a lamp perpetually burning before the picture. This done he retraced his steps to Assisi, pondering deeply in his heart upon the mystical words he had heard, wondering as to their import and signification and what he ought to do to carry out the Divine charge: "Francis, go and repair My House."

*\*Legend of the Three Companions.*

## CHAPTER VI

# The Strait Gate

Non era ancor molto lontan dall' orto,  
ch' ei cominciò a far sentir la terra  
della sua gran virtute alcun conforto.

*Paradiso, xi, 55-57.*

**F**RANCIS was unable immediately to determine what course he ought to pursue in obedience to our Lord's command: "Repair My House." It seemed to him that the words must refer to an earthly house, and naturally connecting them with the decaying condition of S. Damiano, he concluded that his mission was to restore that church. The first difficulty to present itself was want of funds, and in order to obtain these he decided that he would sell some pieces of cloth from the warehouse, and with the proceeds begin the work. It has already been pointed out that at this period Francis was not entirely dependent upon his father. Very probably he had the right to sell a certain proportion of their mutual goods, but it is also probable that Bernardone had a right to dispose of the proceeds as he chose. Bernardone, however, was absent from Assisi at this time, and therefore remained in complete ignorance of his son's proceedings until his return home. The city of Foligno, situated in the Valley of Spoleto at some distance from Assisi, was in those days and still remains one of the busiest trade centres in Umbria, and offered the best market for the merchandise of the district. Thither Francis, one late autumn morning, carried his bales of cloth, riding across the valley where the oaks were all golden leaved, and the vines were shedding their crimson foliage. In the market-place at Foligno he sold his wares, and also his horse with its saddle and bridle; and, his errand satisfactorily accomplished, he prepared to return on foot to S. Damiano. Between Foligno

## *The Strait Gate*

and S. Damiano lie many weary miles, and the long tramp occupied the remaining hours of that short autumn day—the precursor, it may be said, of the many difficult and arduous journeys to be undertaken by St Francis upon his Master's business. Bare-footed and bare-headed, in summer heat and winter cold, was "Christ's Poor Man" to journey not only through the fair provinces of Italy, but to distant foreign lands, carrying in his hand the Gospel of Jesus until the hour when his wounded feet could no longer bear his emaciated form, and the long day was done. A strong desire had arisen in the breast of Francis to seek refuge from the stress of the world within the walls of S. Damiano, and following this impulse, the young man had no sooner offered the proceeds of his sale to the priest of that church than he asked permission to share his humble dwelling. But, as records Thomas of Celano, "Stupefied with surprise, and marvelling beyond words at this sudden conversion, the priest refused to credit what he heard, and, believing himself to be tricked, would not accept his proffered money. And the reason for this was that the priest had beheld Francis but the previous day, as one may say, living licentiously among his relations and companions, and altogether given up to folly." Nevertheless, the earnestness with which Francis pleaded his cause prevailed at last, and the priest consented to receive him into his house; but, from fear of Bernardone's wrath, he persistently refused to accept any money. Finding all persuasion powerless to shake his host's decision, Francis then flung his purse with all its contents through the little window which, to this day, remains for all to see in the southern wall of the building. Francis, having thus obtained the desire of his heart—the shelter of S. Damiano—began forthwith to lead a life of penitence and prayer.

Bernardone had meanwhile returned to Assisi; seeking everywhere for his son, and hearing that he was living at



## *Assisi of St Francis*

S. Damiano, he desired him forthwith to return to his home. Judging from accounts left by early biographers of the events that then followed, it is clear that Francis at this time went in bodily fear of his father. The "Three Companions" mention a certain cave or retreat, known only to one trusted servant of the Bernardone family, to which Francis fled on this occasion, wherein he passed several days in prayer, seeking strength to go forth and meet his angry parent. And so deep was the anguish depicted on the young man's countenance when he emerged from the mental struggle with himself, that as he passed through the streets of Assisi the people failed to recognize him. In the haggard countenance and ragged, unkempt figure hastening towards the Via Nuova, no traces now remained of the once brilliant cavalier, the son of wealthy Bernardone: indeed, the citizens thought him to be some unknown madman, and men, women and children crowded after him, shouting threats, insults and abuse, and pelting him with stones and dirt as he hurried on his way. Bernardone at that moment was occupied in his own warehouse, which lay directly upon the way to Via Nuova, and hearing the tumult in the narrow street, he looked out and witnessed the painful scene. Furious at the sight, "setting no measure," write the "Three Companions," "upon his wrath, he ran upon him even as a wolf toward a sheep," and dragging his son into the house, conveyed him home. Here he confined Francis in a dark closet which, according to tradition, was a small and evil-smelling cupboard beneath the staircase, still to be seen in the Chiesa Nuova. Here Francis remained, Bernardone doubtless hoping that the discomforts of darkness, lack of air and scanty diet would bring the erstwhile luxurious boy back to his senses, and that nothing more would be heard of a religious vocation or a life of penitence and seclusion. But to his surprise and vexation the spirit of Francis remained unbroken and,



ASSISI: IN THE CLOISTERS OF S. DAMIANO



## *The Strait Gate*

it so happening that Bernardone was called away once more on business matters, Madonna Pica, who all the time had disapproved of the harsh and cruel measures adopted toward her son, seized the opportunity to release him. Francis at once returned to S. Damiano. On Bernardone's return home he learned from his wife all that had taken place in his absence. In boundless indignation, writes Thomas of Celano, "he added sin unto sin by bitterly upbraiding and quarrelling with his wife," while using all the means in his power to reclaim his rebellious son. But Francis no longer avoided him, and "in the strength of God went forth of his own accord to meet his furious father."\* At an interview between them he handed over to Bernardone the untouched money acquired by the Foligno sale, reiterating his fixed resolve to dedicate himself entirely to the service of God. Finding his son deaf to his persuasions and his threats, Bernardone next appealed to the City Consuls. They promptly summoned Francis before them, to answer the charge brought forward by his father. But this order Francis refused to obey, on the ground that, being a religious, he was outside the jurisdiction of the civil power.

Nothing daunted, Bernardone turned to the Ecclesiastical Court, and the Bishop responded to his application by dispatching a messenger to Francis, who obediently conformed to the episcopal mandate, saying: "Unto the Lord Bishop will I come, for he is the Father and Lord of souls."

Winter had set in with considerable severity when Francis, clad in his ordinary garb, left S. Damiano to appear before the Bishop's tribunal. It is probable that he entered Assisi by the Porta Moiana and followed the steep ascent leading into the Via Santa Chiara. From this point a few yards would bring him to the Piazza Vescovado, whence he must have passed under the severe façade of Santa Maria Mag-

\* St Bonaventura.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

giore in order to gain the tall iron gates admitting to the episcopal palace. The news had spread abroad that he was cited to appear before the Bishop, and as he crossed the threshold of the lofty chamber in which Bishop Guido sat, he found it filled with a great crowd of his fellow-citizens. The vast and handsome hall of justice still remains, little changed in appearance from what it must have been in the thirteenth century. It forms, as it were, the antechamber to the palace proper, and in an early plan preserved among the Episcopal Archives, is depicted as divided by a wooden screen. Within this screen the Bishop sat in judgement, hearing the pleadings in cases brought before him, while the public were admitted on the outside of the barrier. Immediately behind the Bishop's chair a door leads into the living-rooms of the house, and it would seem that it must have been through this very door that St Francis passed when, as is related further on, he retired into the "Bishop's chamber," and stripped himself of the garments claimed by his father. Francis was indeed received by Bishop Guido with kindness and consideration, but also with distinct reproof as regarded his conduct towards his father. Bernardone demanded from his son the renunciation of his paternal inheritance and the restitution of all the property and goods hitherto enjoyed by him. The Bishop decided in favour of Bernardone, and, having given judgement, addressed Francis as follows:

"Have thou, then, faith in the Lord, my son, and play the man, and fear not, for Himself will be thy helper, and will give thee in abundance whatsoever is needful for the work of His Church,"\*—a prophetic utterance to be abundantly fulfilled in the years to come. Francis uttered not a word, but bowing his head proceeded willingly to make the desired renunciation, and then, withdrawing into the Bishop's chamber, he there stripped himself of his warm soft clothing, and re-

\* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

## *The Strait Gate*

turning cast the garments down at his father's feet. "Then it was seen," writes St Bonaventura, "that under his fair and costly garments the holy man wore a hair-shirt." And "with marvellous fervour he then turned to his father, and thus spoke to him in the presence of all: 'Until this hour have I called thee my father upon earth; from henceforth I may say confidently, My Father Who art in Heaven, in whose Hands I have laid up all my treasure, all my trust, and all my hope.'" Deeply moved by these words, Bishop Guido left his seat, and before all the spectators took the young man in his arms, sheltering his shivering form in the folds of his own ample mantle, over which lay the sacred pallium, for "he recognized clearly in all these events the fulfilment of a Divine command, and perceived well that the action of the man of God, which his own eyes had witnessed, hid some secret mystery. From that hour he became the supporter of Francis, favouring and comforting him, and yearning over him with tender love."

A profound thrill of admiration and sympathy shook the crowd gathered to witness the supreme renunciation of one who had been comrade, neighbour and friend to many then standing there. Hearing the young man resign his riches, they doubtless remembered the Francis of old, with his dreams of wealth, of glory and of fame. They saw him come forth stripped of everything save the outward symbol of penitence, and heard his words, as meekly he took upon his shoulders the yoke of Christ. With wonder they afterwards observed how joyfully he accepted the Bishop's charity, and donned the old cast-off cloak of a servant, and how, like a new Crusader, he marked it with a white cross, using for the purpose a piece of chalk left by some workman in the hall. Then, these things being accomplished, Francis turned away and, wrapped in his miserable cloak, passed through the ranks of the awe-struck spectators, to seek alone the solitudes of Monte Subasio.



## CHAPTER VII

# The Herald of the Great King

La lor concordia e i lor lieti sembianti  
amore e maraviglia e dolce sguardo  
facean esser cagion di pensier santi.

*Paradiso, xi, 76-78.*

**I**T was towards the end of the winter of 1207, when Francis was twenty-five years of age, that the events narrated in the preceding chapter took place. The season was still bitterly cold, and snow covered the ground and lay piled high upon the roadside when Francis, leaving his wild retreat on the rocky flanks of Monte Subasio, started one February morning on foot for the city of Gubbio. His object in visiting Gubbio was to seek a friend who lived there; and as he walked along wrapped in his ragged cloak, the covering proper, so he described it, "to a man poor and crucified to the world," and full of heavenly joy, he sang aloud praises to God in the French tongue. As he proceeded on his way he suddenly fell in with a band of robbers such as infested the country in those days, who stopped and fiercely questioned the strange looking wayfarer, demanding his name, his calling, and his destination. Francis replying made answer: "I am the herald of the great King of Heaven." Amazed and furious at what appeared to them so extravagant an answer, the men laid rough hands upon him, and after beating and ill-treating him, finally took away his poor cloak and flung him into a wayside ditch, deep in snow. "Lie there," they cried, "thou herald of nothing, who callest thyself the herald of God."

Francis lay in the bitterly cold snow waiting until the thieves had disappeared before attempting to regain the high road, and then, clad only in his shirt and rejoicing to



## *The Herald of the Great King*

be counted worthy to suffer violence and cold for his Lord's sake, he resumed his way towards Gubbio. Evening found him at the gate of a lonely monastery, where the monks, seeing him in such miserable plight, gave him shelter.

But the hospitality afforded by these unknown religious was grudging and churlish, and the food they gave him to eat scanty and poor; garments they refused him altogether, and, in answer to his request for work, they set him to assist the kitchen scullion. As speedily as possible Francis took leave of his unfriendly hosts, and resumed the journey to Gubbio. Here he was gladly welcomed by the friend in search of whom he had come; all his wants were supplied and he was furnished with garments—a grey tunic with leathern belt, a pair of shoes, and a staff. A grey tunic such as that now assumed by St Francis was familiar to medieval Italians as the peculiar garb of the numerous hermits, or solitaries, who then abode among the desolate rocky mountains, or dwelt in sparsely inhabited districts all over the country. The colour of the tunic was the colour of ashes, and during many years the Friars Minor were distinguished by this ash-grey tunic; later, however, the colour was changed to brown—the familiar brown habit, girded about with a hempen cord in pious memory of the coarse rope which replaced the leathern belt given to Francis by his charitable friend. Both tunic and rope girdle are still worn by the friars of this twentieth century.

After a short sojourn with his friend, Francis returned to S. Damiano, stopping on the road to visit the lazar settlement near Rivo Torto, where he passed some days tending and comforting the unhappy inmates.

He had been absent for about two months when he rejoined the priest of S. Damiano, but he had by no means forgotten his vision in the church, or the Divine Voice with its command: "Francis, go and repair My House." The problem

## *Assisi of St Francis*

as to how this task was to be accomplished still remained unsolved, for Francis—now quite destitute, and living at the charge of his poor host—was in even worse plight than when he sold the cloth at Foligno. But the means were shortly revealed to him, and being “perfect in obedience,” for love of “Him who was poor and lowly in heart,” he despised the shame of the act, and entered Assisi begging in the streets for stones wherewith to repair the church of S. Damiano. “He that shall give me one stone,” cried Francis, “shall have one reward, but he that giveth me two shall have two rewards; yea, and he that giveth three shall have three rewards.” \*

The enthusiasm of the citizens was roused by this unwonted appeal, and while willing hands were soon conveying stones to the little church, to the amazement and admiration of his fellow-citizens the heaviest stones and the hardest work were chosen by Francis himself, who, unwearied, laboured hard to carry out his Lord’s command. The restoration was at length completed, and S. Damiano stood once more fair as a bride amid the green cornfields and olive gardens; but Francis was not yet satisfied, for there remained other Houses of God to build up. His loving zeal and energy were now particularly directed to two others—the first, S. Pietro, because of the “special devotion he bore to the Prince of the Apostles,” \* and the second, Sta Maria della Porziuncula, or St Mary of the Little Portion, “because of the exceeding love he bore to the Mother of Christ.” †

At this time S. Pietro stood outside the city walls; and the Porziuncula, placed among the fields and woods in the valley, lies about two miles distant from the present Porta S. Francesco. The important Benedictine Abbey of Monte Subasio owned both these churches, and the abbot and monks, who

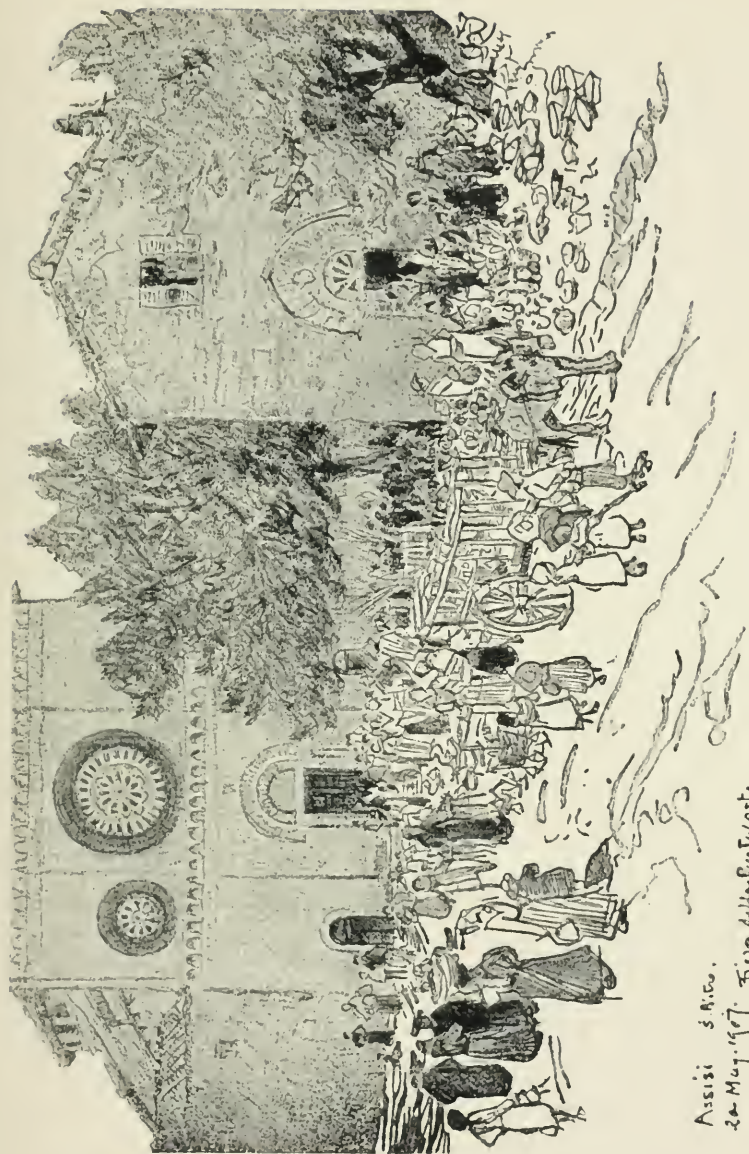
\* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

† St Bonaventura.



ASSISI: PORTA S. FRANCESCO





Assisi s. Pietro.  
2a. May. 1907. Fiera della Pentecosta.

ASSISI: THE PENTECOSTAL FAIR IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH OF S. PIETRO.





## *The Herald of the Great King*

were friendly to Francis, raising no objection to the restorations which he desired to carry out upon their neglected property, he quickly took in hand and completed the work. The second alone of the three churches restored by St Francis in the year 1207 has disappeared. S. Damiano remains practically unchanged: the Porziuncula, now sheltered within the vast basilica of Sta Maria degli Angeli, erected by the piety of Catholic Christendom, is still the dim, unadorned little sanctuary so dear to the heart of the Seraphic Patriarch. But the S. Pietro of St Francis has long since passed away. The present church of that name, standing upon the broad piazza within the walls, and adorned with a fine belfry and beautiful octagonal lantern, occupies the site of yet another church, destroyed by fire, which had replaced the original edifice that Francis laboured to repair in the mellow autumn season of just seven hundred years since. A tradition which has grown up around these three churches links them symbolically with the three Franciscan Orders. Thus the Porziuncula symbolizes the First Order—the Friars Minor; S. Damiano is the cradle of the Second Order—that of the Poor Ladies or Poor Clares; from S. Pietro springs the Third Order—the Tertiaries, the laity to whom St Francis gave the Rule which was so materially to alter the whole social order of Medieval Europe.

Francis lived at S. Damiano during the months spent in repairing these churches, and every day the love and affection that his friend the priest bore towards him grew stronger and deeper. The good man, inured to a life of hardship and poverty, sometimes even of want, made shift to provide Francis with better nourishment than he gave himself, and even from time to time with certain delicacies of which he knew that the younger man loved to partake, with such tender compassion did he regard the austerities that Francis practised, and the hard work that he daily performed. Quite



## *Assisi of St Francis*

unconscious of these gentle subterfuges, his guest perceived no difference between his own and his friend's fare. But on a certain evening the priest revealed his secret, and stricken with remorse and shame Francis at once determined no longer to burden his friend, reasoning thus within himself: "Wilt thou find this priest, wherever thou mayst go, to shew thee such courtesy? This is not the life of a poor man, which thou didst desire to choose, but, even as the beggar with dish in hand, as need doth compel, gathereth together a medley of various victuals, so of thine own free will oughtest thou to live, for the love of Him Who was born poor, and did most poorly live in the world, remained naked and poor upon the cross, and was buried in another's sepulchre."\*

When, the very next day, Francis took a bowl and went into Assisi to beg his bread from house to house, some of the citizens at whose doors he knocked received him kindly, and others again drove him from the threshold with blows and insults. But many praised God for the example given by this His humble servant. When the quest for daily bread was ended Francis sat down to eat his beggar's meal, "but when he would have eaten that medley of various meats, at first he shrunk back, for that he had never been used willingly even to see, much less to eat, such scraps. At length, having conquered himself and begun to eat, it seemed unto him in eating that no rich syrup had ever tasted in any wise so delightful, so he gave God thanks for that He had changed bitter into sweet for him, and had consoled him in manifold wise. So from that time he bade that priest purvey no food for him, nor yet to cause that any food be so purveyed."†

Shortly after this episode, Francis quitted S. Damiano, and took up his abode near the Porziuncula, the spot destined to be the birthplace of his Order, and to him the sweetest

\* *Legend of the Three Companions.*

† *Ibid.*



ASSISI : PROCESSION LEAVING CHURCH OF S. PIETRO



## *The Herald of the Great King*

spot on earth. Within this humble Oratory he spent long hours praying and meditating, and angels would come and visit him as he knelt all absorbed in the contemplation of heavenly things. In thanksgiving for these signal marks of Divine favour towards himself, Francis presently changed the name of the church from Sta Maria della Porziuncula to Santa Maria degli Angeli—St Mary of the Angels. But he had not yet attained the ultimate goal, and still many sacrifices and yet a higher life awaited him. A greater than all preceding changes was now at hand, and this took place upon St Matthias's day, February 24, 1209.

Early on that morning, Francis was devoutly hearing Mass in the church of Sta Maria della Porziuncula, and tradition holds that no one else was present. When the priest, reading the Gospel for the day, came to the verses in the tenth chapter of that according to St Matthew: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat,"\* the words went straight to the heart of the listener. "This," he said within himself, "is that which above all things I desire: that which my whole heart craves." And straightway he flung aside his tunic, his beggar's wallet and his staff, and removed the shoes from off his feet; and then begging a coarse garment from a peasant, Francis donned it, girding his body about with a hempen rope. Thus miserably clad, but rich in that he bore Christ's Gospel, he went forth among the people to live the life Christ taught. He was only "Brother Francis, Christ's Poor Man," but by divine inspiration he spoke to the multitude as the herald of God, proclaiming peace to all who desired to love and serve the King of Heaven, and do penance for their sins.

\*This Gospel was changed later to St Matthew xi, 25-30.

## CHAPTER VIII

# The First Companions

Tanto che il venerabile Bernardo  
si scalzò prima, e retro a tanta pace  
corse, e correndo gli parv' esser tardo.

*Paradiso, xi, 79-81.*

THE year 1209 still found Francis leading a solitary life of great austerity, and as he passed day by day through the streets of Assisi begging his bread, many gazed upon him with awe and wonder, for it seemed as though "the frail wall of his flesh alone prevented him from seeing God face to face." By word and example he would invite men to do penance for their sins, and to love and serve God; and many people heard him gladly. Among these latter was a certain young noble of the city, somewhat older than Francis, who, after grave deliberation, determined to give away all that he possessed, and to follow his example. This man, by name Bernard of Quintavalle, "who," as declares St Bonaventura, "deserved to be called the first-born son of the Holy Father, by priority of time no less than by pre-eminence of sanctity," was rich and influential; his fine house, situated in Via Gregorio, one of the most picturesque quarters of Assisi, is now known as Palazzo Sbaraglini. This old street, which, in the course of long centuries, has suffered many changes in the style and appearance of its buildings, still bears its quiet, old-world character, with nothing to remind the visitor of the turmoil and restlessness of modern times. On either side of the flagged and narrow way rise lofty palaces, by their Renaissance windows, their ornamented cornices and doorways sculptured with many a shield of arms, clearly to be recognized as buildings of later date than the thirteenth century. The Sbaraglini Palace

## *The First Companions*

stands some way down the Via Gregorio; immediately opposite to its entrance, above the door of a small oratory, is to be seen a fresco of our Lady enthroned amidst many choiring angels—a charming composition although its tones of red and blue, faintly tinged with gold, are now grown sadly dim. Beyond are rough and brown-stained walls of rococo design, made bright with overhanging flowers, and here too, in a recess of these same walls, stands a well, about which groups of women gather to fill their water jars.

This venerable palace of the Quintavalle family has since those early days witnessed many and great vicissitudes, but all who pass along the street may yet see the high-arched, narrow doorway through which St Francis stepped when, as the inscription above the arch reminds us,\* he supped and slept beneath the roof of Blessed Bernard.

The story of Brother Bernard of Assisi, and how he took the habit of Friar Minor, as told in the *Fioretti*, or *Little Flowers of St Francis*, is very charming. This very loveable first Companion of St Francis was, while yet living in the world, a pious God-fearing citizen, one who had followed with sympathy and interest the wonderful conversion of his future leader, and his final adoption of the religious life. For the space of two years after this event, Bernard paid close attention to all that concerned the son of Bernardone. As time went on, he became more and more convinced that this was no common man or unstable fanatic, but one seriously endeavouring to conform in all things to the will of God. Wishing for yet fuller assurance “he called him one

\* The inscription may fittingly be reproduced here :

HIC  
S. FRANCISCUM  
AD CÆNAM ET CUBITUM  
B : BERNARDUS QUINTAVALLIS  
EXCEPIT ET IN EXTASIM VIDIT



## *Assisi of St Francis*

evening to sup and lodge with him: and St Francis consented thereto, and supped with him and lodged. And thereat Bernard set it in his heart to watch his sanctity; wherefore he let make ready for him a bed in his own proper chamber, in the which at night-time ever a lamp did burn. And St Francis, for to hide his sanctity, when he was come into the chamber, incontinent did throw himself upon the bed and made as though he slept; and likewise Bernard, after some short space, set himself to lie down and fell to snoring loudly, in fashion as though he slept right soundly. Whereby St Francis, thinking truly that Bernard was asleep, in his first sleep rose up from his bed and set himself to pray, lifting up his hands and eyes unto heaven, and with exceeding great devotion and fervour said: ‘My God, my God.’ And thus saying and sorely weeping he abode till morning, always repeating, ‘My God, my God,’ and naught beside; and this St Francis said, while musing on and marvelling at the excellence of the divine Majesty, which deigned to stoop down to a perishing world and through his poor little Francis purposed to bring a remedy for the salvation of his soul and the souls of others. Therefore, illumined by the Holy Spirit, or the spirit of prophecy, foreseeing what great things God would do through him and his Order, and minding him of his own insufficiency and little worth, he cried unto God and besought Him that by His pity and almighty power, without the which the weakness of man might naught avail, He would supply his lack, aid and fulfil what of itself was nothing worth. Bernard seeing, by the light of the lamp, the most devout acts of St Francis, and devoutly pondering in his mind the words that he spake, was touched and inspired by the Holy Spirit to change his life. In the morning, therefore, he called St Francis and thus bespake him: ‘Brother Francis, I am wholly purposed in my heart to leave the world and follow thee in whatsoever thou mayest bid



## *The First Companions*

me.' Hearing this, St Francis rejoiced in spirit and said: 'Bernard, this that thou sayest is a task so great and difficult, that thereof must we seek counsel of our Lord Jesu Christ, and beseech Him that He be pleased to show us His will therein, and teach us how we may bring it to pass: wherefore let us go together to the bishop's house, wherein is a good priest, and let us say the Mass; then let us continue in prayer until Tierce, beseeching God that on thrice opening of the Missal He may reveal to us the path it is His will we should elect.' Bernard made answer that this pleased him right well. So fared they forth and came to the bishop's house; and after they had heard the Mass, and continued praying until Tierce, the priest, at the bidding of St Francis, took the Missal, and making the sign of the most holy Cross, opened it thrice in the name of our Lord Jesu Christ; and at the first opening appeared the words that Christ spake in the Gospel to the young man that asked concerning the way of perfection: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor and follow Me'; at the second opening appeared those words that Christ spake unto the Apostles when He sent them forth to preach: 'Take nothing for your journey, nor staves, nor scrip, nor bread, nor money'; wishing thereby to teach them that for their daily bread they should set all their hopes on God and fix their mind wholly on the preaching of the holy Gospel; at the third opening of the Missal appeared those words that Christ spake: 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.' Then spake St Francis unto Bernard: 'Behold, the counsel that Christ giveth us: come, then, and fulfil that which thou hast heard; and blessed be our Lord Jesu Christ, who hath deigned to show forth His own life in the holy Gospel.' '\*

\* *The Little Flowers of St Francis*, translated by Professor T. W. Arnold, Revised edition, 1908. pp. 3-5.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Francis and Bernard had but little distance to traverse between Via Gregorio and the bishop's palace, but during that short morning walk an important event took place, for, as the new found friends proceeded, communing together in the joy of the Spirit, they were joined by yet another disciple, one known as Peter of Catania. This Peter belonged to a family of Assisi whose name finds honourable mention in the City Archives, but he does not otherwise appear to have been a man either of special position or of wealth. Peter was a canon, probably a lay-canon, of S. Rufino, and also a Doctor of Laws; he must therefore have been a man of considerable education according to the standard of the period. Later on he became a most devoted Friar Minor, was first Vicar-General of the Order, and one of the chosen companions who, with St Francis, made the journey to the East in 1219.

Bernard was rich; Peter on the other hand was a man of modest means; but both unhesitatingly accepted the primary condition laid down by Francis in his simple creed: "Give all thou hast to the poor, then come and follow our Lord Jesus Christ." This was indeed, in his mind, the only portal admitting to the religious life, and so these two ardent souls distributed their money and their goods; giving them to the poor, the sick and the needy, and turning their backs upon the world, they joyfully adopted the coarse grey frock, and hastened to join Brother Francis.

In this wise it may be said that the Order of Friars Minor was instituted, and Francis with his two companions now homeless and destitute, and, like their Divine Master, having "not where to lay their heads," turned in their extremity to the Porziuncula. Here, in the immediate vicinity of the little church of Sta Maria della Porziuncula, they constructed a rude hut in which they abode, and were shortly afterwards joined by yet another disciple, Giles of Assisi.



OLD HOUSES AND GARDENS OVERLOOKING THE PLAIN OF UMBRIA



## *The First Companions*

This newcomer, who had for some little time been absent from his home, heard on his return of the strange doings of Francis Bernardone, and how Bernard Quintavalle and Peter of Catania had followed his example and abjured the world. It is supposed, also, that Giles assisted at the distribution of Bernard's wealth, and those who have recognized the great qualities of this earnest disciple of St Francis, can well realize how the very depths of his being must have been stirred by the sight of Bernard, with Francis by his side, distributing to Christ's poor all that he possessed. Full, therefore, of enthusiasm, he hastened to the church of S. Giorgio, where, prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, he vowed that he also would join these new servants of Jesus Christ.

The following day, April 23, 1209, the feast day of St George, Giles, having heard early Mass, started forth in quest of Francis and his companions, who, he heard, were living in a hut somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Porziuncula. There he proposed to join them, but the search did not prove easy, for in his impetuosity, he had failed to make full inquiries as to the exact locality. In those days the roads were very bad and difficult to follow; Giles, in fact, lost his way. "And coming to where two roads met, and not knowing which to take, he directed his prayer to Christ, the best of guides, who led him straight to the cottage; and as he went, St Francis came out of the wood where he had been in prayer, and came to meet him, wondering wherefore he had come. Whereupon Giles threw himself on the ground, and kneeling at his feet humbly begged that he would receive him as one of his companions for the love of God."\* Francis unhesitatingly accepted him, and thus did Brother Giles, the strong-hearted, single-minded man of the people, closest friend and disciple of St Francis, enter the Order. Thomas

\* *The Little Flowers of St Francis.*

## *Assisi of St Francis*

of Celano alludes to him as "Brother Giles, who has left us an example of most perfect obedience"; and in his own words he declares: "The fear of God is holy and constrains men to submit themselves in true humility to the yoke of obedience, and to bow their heads to the very earth. Humility is the daughter of the fear of God."\* "In paradise," writes a later son of St Francis, "there is none Saint who was not humble,"† and the truth of this statement is more and more forcibly brought home to the mind as the story of Francis and his early companions unfolds itself. For the farther we follow them, the more joyously are they seen pressing after their saintly leader along the narrow path ending at the feet of God, their steps illumined by the three lamps of Poverty, Humility, and Obedience.

Giles, the good brother God has sent us—so Francis described him—accepted with humble gratitude the brethren's coarse grey tunic, and "the four were joined together in the joy of the Holy Spirit." Worshipping together in the church of Santa Maria della Porziuncula, they would often withdraw yet further from the world, passing into the woods that surrounded their poor hut, there to pray and meditate in a silence broken only by the chirping of birds or the humming of insects. The labour of their hands, and the alms which they begged, sufficed for all bodily necessities, and at the feet of Francis the three first Brothers found the spiritual nourishment desired of their souls.

But Francis was not long content to lead the peaceful life of the Porziuncula; the burning thirst for souls, the yearning love for sinners that shone so pre-eminently in him, bade him go forth and work in the Lord's vineyard. He therefore consulted with the brethren, and it was decided that, journeying two and two, they should begin to preach and to teach

\* *Aurei detti dal B. Egidio*, Edited by Monsignore Briganti.

† *Humility of Heart*, By Father Cajetan Mary da Bergamo, Capuchin.

## *The First Companions*

in the provinces. In this way Bernard of Quintavalle and Peter of Catania set out to preach in the Province of Emilia, while Francis and Giles turned their steps towards the March of Ancona.

Their mission was to bring souls to repentance, and to win the people back to the practice of the Faith, and as Francis and Giles trudged along the dusty roads, they sang lauds aloud, and praised God for His goodness and mercy towards mankind. They journeyed side by side through town and country, two ragged grey figures, addressing words of exhortation and encouragement to both rich and poor, deaf to mockery and abuse, indifferent to insults and blows, always compassionate, gracious, and strong. "Peace be with you," Francis cried to the thronging people, "for the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." And Giles would urge: "Take heed of the words that Brother Francis speaks unto you, and of his counsels, for they are very good."



## CHAPTER IX

# The Divine Mission

Ma perch' io non proceda troppo chiuso,  
Francesco e Povertà per questi amanti  
prendi oramai nel mio parlar diffuso.

*Paradiso, xi, 73-75.*

**T**HEIR journeys concluded, Francis and his companions turned their steps once more toward the Porziuncula, resuming in that familiar environment of green woods and fields their daily life of prayer and self-abnegation. Here the little community was shortly doubled by the incorporation of four new disciples, all citizens of Assisi. Of these four new friars but little is known beyond their names: Sabbatino, Morico, John of Capello—traditionally regarded as the black sheep of the flock, the Judas Iscariot of the Order, although upon no very trustworthy evidence—and Philip, surnamed “the Long,” of whom Thomas of Celano says: “God touched his mouth with the live coal of purity, to the end that naught save sweet and pious discourses should fall from his lips. He was a man versed beyond his fellows in knowledge of the Word of God, and this without having made any particular study of Holy Scripture. Such was this man who followed after him whom the Princes of Belial, that is to say, the Children of this World, despised as one unlettered and of disordered intellect.” The latter reproach was very true of the times in which Thomas of Celano wrote, for the thirteenth century had dawned upon a world in which religion had sunk to a very low ebb, and was held in but small regard. The clergy were corrupt, the laity indifferent, and little heed was paid by men either to the lessons of the Gospels or the precepts of holy Church. The movement inaugurated by St Francis was unpalatable to the upper classes, whose lives were lapped in luxury and self-

## *The Divine Mission*

indulgence, and distrusted by the lower orders, who through hard toil, misery and want were reduced to a condition not far removed from that of the brute creation. By the very nature of our humanity reform must always provoke opposition ; and the earliest Franciscans and their holy Founder experienced no special exemption from this rule. The common people interrupted their preaching with gibes, and treated the friars with insults, rude laughter, often indeed with blows. The rich were indignant that the practice of holy poverty should be so earnestly recommended to them, while the kinsfolk of the brethren execrated the friars for daring to impoverish their families by distributing their inheritance to the poor. Meanwhile the clergy held aloof, and their attitude cannot be seriously blamed, for in the then condition of Christendom the bishops were constrained to proceed cautiously, and were bound to reserve judgement upon all new religious movements. Viewed across the gulf of seven hundred years, the work of St Francis may well be regarded as great, enduring, and complete. At such a distance, results may be judged ; and its influence on religion, morals, and learning determined with an accuracy impossible when the Order was in its infancy, when heresies were rife, and when schisms, especially in Italy and in France, menaced the Church on every side. The various sects of the Cathari, the Patarini, the "Poor Men of Lyons," the Albigenses, and many others were everywhere at work and active, and had been so since the death of St Bernard. Professing their desire for the reform of the clergy and the practice of poverty, the leaders of all these sects were at one in defying the authority of the Holy See. These facts tend to explain why, in the early days of his religious life, the very love that St Francis showed for his "Lady Poverty" made him an object of suspicion in the eyes of the clergy. They also explain why, when the lessons taught by the life and rule of the

## *Assisi of St Francis*

little community at the Porziuncula presently began really to trouble the minds of many pious individuals, the Bishop of Assisi resolved to institute inquiries. Bishop Guido had already proved himself the steadfast friend and protector of the young Francis. By inviting him to an interview he doubtless desired, as his chief pastor, to afford him an opportunity of explaining his position, plans, and aim.

The "Three Companions" give the following brief, although unfortunately incomplete, account of the conversation that took place at this interview between Francis and the Bishop. Mutilated as it is, the account sufficiently indicates the seriousness of the matters discussed at it. "Hard and harsh," thus Bishop Guido addressed his youthful visitor, "seemeth unto me your life, to wit to possess naught in this world." To him saith the Holy Man: "My lord, if we should have possessions, we should need arms to protect ourselves, for thence arise disputes and lawsuits; and for this cause the love of God and of our neighbour is wont oft-times to be hindered. Wherefore we be minded to possess naught of worldly goods in this world." And the Bishop was much pleased with the answer of the man of God.\*

One of the reasons given by Francis to Bishop Guido for "possessing nothing"—the lawlessness of those times—was only too well founded. Such lawlessness, greatly fostered by the then existing feudal system, was the source of many of the most crying evils of the thirteenth century. With the great nobles and higher ecclesiastics, as sole owners of the land, cultivation was carried on by means of the forced labour extorted from the unfortunate villeins or serfs who were dependent upon the all-powerful landlords. The natural result of this system was deep and intense class hatred, seething discontent, and hopeless misery, which frequently endeavoured to find its outlet in attempted revolts against the tyranny

\* *Legend of the Three Companions.*



ASSISI : AUTUMN TINTS



## *The Divine Mission*

exercised by the masters. For "masters," in the strictest sense of the word, the powerful nobles were, disposing of the very bodies and souls of the miserable serfs, who, while bound to labour for them, were bound also to carry arms in their defence and fight in their quarrels, and any excuse was good enough to serve as pretext for attacking a weaker neighbour. Francis spoke the simple truth when he pointed out to Bishop Guido that it behoved prudent men to be well equipped with arms, for woe betide him who could not defend by force goods that aroused the cupidity of his neighbour.

From the first moment of his conversion the loving heart of Francis had been deeply affected by the unhappy condition of the "Minori," the poor and oppressed lower orders. As he traversed the fields between Assisi and the Porziuncula, going to and from his interview with the kindly bishop, his eyes must have rested upon many a bent and ragged figure, drooping beneath the burden of hard and unrequited toil. Seeing on all sides, in the servant as in the master, the fruits of that terrible lust after gold which turneth the hearts of men from good to evil, he resolved with strengthened will to avoid all traffic with the root of sin, and always to hold gold and silver in such despite and abhorrence as a man should hold uncleanness and corruption.

Meanwhile the little company of the hut by the Porziuncula lived by the labour of their hands and on the ready alms of the inhabitants of the district, to whom in return they gave friendly counsel no less than the encouragement of exhortation, prayer, and good example. On a certain morning Francis had withdrawn into a little wood to pray. Bitterly discouraged, he had prostrated himself on the ground weeping and lamenting the sins of his past life, and repeating over and over again these words: "God be merciful to me a sinner," when, "suddenly," writes Thomas of Celano, "a feeling of great joy and of ineffable sweetness flooded



## *Assisi of St Francis*

his entire being, penetrating the most secret chambers of his heart. Then being rapt to the seventh heaven, and all absorbed in the divine illumination, the barriers of his human intelligence were cast down, and the future stood clearly revealed to him. When presently he returned to his brethren he cried unto them with a smiling countenance; 'Comfort ye, my dear sons, and be joyful in the Lord; and distress not yourselves because to your eyes we appear to be but few in number.' And forthwith he described a vision that he had seen in the forest, in which was revealed to him a great multitude of men and women flocking towards the Porziuncula: 'The French came,' cried St Francis, 'the Spaniards hurried, the Germans and the English ran, while others of divers and unknown tongues pressed hard upon these, verily a multitude innumerable. Let us therefore,' continued the holy Father, 'return thanks to almighty God, O dear Brothers, for all His bounties, more especially for that He has deigned to reveal the manner in which our company, in the present and in the future, shall endure.' '\* And having thus spoken, Francis led the brethren back into the little wood, and there amid the songs of birds and the stirring of the breeze in the high branches, he revealed to them the divine message, and gave them his first "Obedience." †

Although the acknowledged leader and chief of the community, Francis had not, it seems, exercised the authority of Superior until this incident. Now, however, strengthened by the Holy Spirit and encouraged by the heavenly vision of the future, he personally assumed this solemn office.

Placing himself, "the standard-bearer of Christ," at the head of his small band of "poor Penitents," he prepared with the Divine assistance to be their leader in the good

\* Thomas of Celano.

† "Obedience," in the religious life, signifies the commands or orders of a Superior.



## *The Divine Mission*

fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Choosing from the spiritual armoury the three counsels of perfection—Poverty, Obedience and Chastity, and girded with these sharp and salutary weapons, he went forth by God's grace to combat and overcome the great enemy of souls.

## CHAPTER X

# The First Seal

Ma regalmente sua dura intenzione  
ad Innocenzio aperse, e da lui ebbe  
primo sigillo a sua religione.

*Paradiso, xi, 91-3.*

**F**RANCIS dispatched the brethren on their several missions with these words: "Go and proclaim peace to men; preach penance for the remission of sins. Be patient in tribulation, watchful in prayer, strong in labour, moderate in speech, grave in conversation, thankful for benefits; for if ye shall observe all these things an eternal kingdom is prepared for you." And after this he said singly to each, "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He shall nourish thee."\* On this, as on their first journey, Francis and the brethren met with some measure of success, and everywhere their appearance excited much popular curiosity. Their strange garb, and the novelty of their methods, attracted great attention, the people ever asking who the strangers were and whence they came. To such questions the brethren invariably replied, "We be poor Penitents from Assisi."

The hut near the Porziuncula remained their headquarters, and here the brethren, their labours for the time being ended, reassembled, and soon many new disciples from all parts of the country joined them, among whom were Sylvester a priest, and a young knight, Angelo Tancredi by name. As their numbers constantly increased, they at length begged Francis to give them a Rule—a request which it is believed he granted by writing a Rule no longer in existence. This Rule, which is said to have been very simple, and

\* S. Bonaventura.

## *The First Seal*

to have contained but few details, was designed to bring about conformity of action. But although it made community of life possible at the Porziuncula, Francis desired something more authoritative, nothing less, indeed, than the highest sanction obtainable for his new-born society, and therefore he announced his intention of journeying to Rome and seeking to obtain from the Supreme Pontiff a solemn approbation of the Rule. Such a step was at that period most unusual, for it was not until 1215, at the Fourth Lateran Council, that it was made obligatory on all founders of new religious Orders to seek approbation of their Rule from the Pope. Nevertheless, Francis felt a strong desire to lay his Rule at the feet of the Holy Father, and obtain for it his approbation as well as his blessing upon the work that was now developing so rapidly—a longing he expressed in the following terms: “I perceive, Brethren, that the Lord is minded of His mercy to increase our fellowship. Let us go, therefore, unto our Mother the Holy Roman Church, and notify unto the Pope that which the Lord hath begun to work through us, that by His good pleasure and command we may carry on that which we have begun.”

Biographers are agreed that, as our Lord chose twelve Apostles, so did Francis choose twelve brethren to accompany him on his journey to Rome. The undertaking teemed with difficulties, for Francis was young, and still without influence or position, and to approach the Pope was not easy; in fact, the probability of obtaining an interview must have appeared to him almost impossible, and as the brethren hastened along on the road to Rome they cannot but have often discussed their poor chances of success. Fortunately, however, for the little company the Bishop of Assisi happened to be in Rome at the time, and he gladly gave them his assistance, and having further obtained the protection of the Cardinal John of St Paul, Bishop of Sabina, a member of

## *Assisi of St Francis*

the great Colonna family, they succeeded in time in obtaining an audience of the Pope.

At that time the Chair of St Peter was filled by Innocent III, the greatest perhaps of all the medieval popes. The worldly spirit then abroad among the clergy, and the ostentatious and luxurious lives led by many of the higher ecclesiastics was well known to him; and the strict voluntary poverty practised by Francis and his followers, although considered by the Curia as carried almost beyond the bounds of human possibility, was not unfavourably viewed by Innocent.

However, he refrained from giving entire approbation to the Rule that Francis had made, but gave to him and to his disciples authority, with the permission of the Ordinaries, to preach everywhere; he also directed that each should receive the tonsure, and then dismissed them with the Apostolic blessing.

With hearts brimful of happiness, and of gratitude to almighty God for the favours they had received in Rome, Francis and his companions returned to Assisi, establishing themselves now at Rivo Torto. The exact position of this place is disputed by Franciscan scholars, of whom several have concluded that the real site upon which St Francis founded his first monastery is not the present sanctuary of that name.

The church of Rivo Torto is a modern erection, the earlier building having been destroyed by fire, but it enshrines that which the faithful hearts of many men and women still believe to be the very hut occupied by Francis and his brethren when, in the autumn of the year 1210, they returned from Rome.

The church, which is within a short distance of Santa Maria degli Angeli, stands beside the broad high road on which all the local traffic of the country connecting Perugia

## *The First Seal*

with Spello, Foligno, and other cities to the East, travels across the Umbrian plain. Country carts drawn by superb white oxen, fast-going little gigs, and hooded and curtained vehicles from mountain villages, pass by, while little groups of brown-froked friars bound for the sanctuary, or sturdy peasants going to and from the fields, and country women knitting, and tending the black and white pigs of the district by the roadside, give a kindly smile of greeting to the traveller speeding on his way. High above on the hill-side lies Assisi, with S. Damiano half concealed among a group of cypresses below the Porta Nuova; and far away along the white and dusty road rises the great cupola above the Porziuncula.

Francis and his brethren suffered many hardships and privations during the autumn of their return, and the following spring. The low ground on which their hovel stood was inundated, provisions were lacking, and sometimes the brethren subsisted solely on roots and berries, or a few turnips begged from the compassionate country folk. They were much inconvenienced, also, by want of space, the narrow limits of their wretched shelter scarcely providing sleeping-room for all the brothers. In the meantime the fame of Francis and his community was spreading, and even the Emperor Otho IV of Brunswick, travelling to Rome to receive the Imperial crown from Innocent III, turned aside to visit the "Poverello."

Francis, however, refused to receive the Prince; instead, he sent a brother to meet him, with a strict warning against the love of pomp and vanity, and a message foretelling the speedy end of Otho's imperial power. The saint's warning remained unheeded, yet the prophecy proved true. Excommunicated by Innocent III for continually breaking faith with the Holy See, Otho's crown devolved upon the Child-Emperor Frederick II. The deposed monarch strove for a

## *Assisi of St Francis*

time to rebuild his fallen fortunes, but was finally defeated in 1214, at the battle of Bouvines, by Philip Augustus, King of France; four years later he died in misery.

The papal approbation of Francis's Rule, and the permission given to the brethren to preach, increased the eagerness of the population to hear the holy man. The first to offer him their pulpit were his former teachers the Canons of S. Giorgio, but their church proved far too small to hold the crowds that pressed to hear him, and the Bishop suggested the Cathedral of S. Rufino. The offer was accepted, and within its yet unfinished walls—seventy years had elapsed since the laying of the foundation-stone—Francis, the son of Bernardone, for the first time preached with authority to his beloved fellow-citizens.

From that time forward he took an active part in the politics of his native town; in every direction his influence appears to have been felt, and it was to him that the magistrates and citizens now turned for advice and support, accepting his simple counsels and following his single-hearted precepts. "*Al tempo di Guido Vescovo e di frate Francesco,*" run the words round the apse of the ancient church of Santa Maria Maggiore, rebuilt at this same period; and a yet more interesting memorial exists, which bears strong testimony to the influence exerted, and the interest shown, by Francis in all matters connected with his birthplace. This memorial, a document quoted at length by the late Signor Cristofani, the learned historian of Assisi, is a contract or pact between the "*Maggiore*" or patricians, and the "*Minori*" or plebeians of Assisi. The preamble to this document, after opening with: "*In the name of God, the supernal grace of the Holy Spirit assisting us,* sets forth that the statute therein contained is designed to establish a perpetual peace between the Assisan '*Maggiori* and *Minori,*'" and forbids all future treaties with papal or





ASSISI: THE FOUNTAIN, PIAZZA DELLA MINERVA





## *The First Seal*

imperial legates unless with the assent of all classes in the Commune. There follow many regulations granting freedom to serfs, fixing the exact sum payable by exiled citizens desiring to return, and the precise remuneration to be given to the Militia. The consuls are ordered to complete the building of the Cathedral of S. Rufino, and the document closes with the date, November 9, 1210, and the signatures of the principal City Fathers. This great "peace" between the hitherto ever-warring factions in Assisi was ratified upon the Piazza Minerva, and happily remained unbroken during many years, nor was it even disturbed by the speedy return from Perugia of certain fiery spirits sternly exiled after the war of 1202.

The citizens of Assisi, delivered from the rule of Pope and Emperor, now enjoyed a term of good government; and the moderation shown by the consuls once more brought about friendly relations between clergy and people; while, the times being peaceful and prosperous, attention appears to have been directed to improving the city and to providing for the magistrates a dwelling worthy of the dignity of their office.

Adjoining the venerable temple of Minerva stood an ancient palace that in the year 1210 was the property of the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Subasio. This building Maccabeo, the then ruling abbot and his monks, offered to the city for the use of its magistrates. The munificent gift was accepted, and a deed executed upon April 12, 1212, between Abbot Maccabeo and his monks on the one part, and the consuls on the other, ceded to the latter for the space of one hundred years the present Palazzo Comunale, which was then situated in the very heart of the city. The deed provided that if, on conclusion of the first hundred years, consuls and citizens desire to retain possession of the palace, they may do so for another period of a hundred years, on pay-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

ment to the monastery of S. Benedetto of the sum of twenty "soldi" in money. The consuls undertake to offer yearly to the monastery church, on the feast of St Benedict, March 21, nineteen "denari," and, finally, Abbot Maccabeo reserves to the use of himself and his community the cellars and rooms "sotto il portico"—within the portico of the Temple of Minerva.

To this circumstance Cristofani ascribes one of the chief glories of his birthplace, the fine condition of preservation in which the beautiful portico of Santa Maria sopra Minerva has been maintained down to the present day. Whether, as may be conjectured, the new spirit engendered by the fervour and example of St Francis did or did not constrain the Benedictines to pay greater heed to the houses of God entrusted to their keeping, there can at least be no question as to the splendid generosity and also the friendliness to Francis and his companions displayed on several notable occasions by the community of Monte Subasio. These were still occupying the miserable hovel at Rivo Torto, when on a certain day, as a brother was reading aloud the Rule, and had reached this passage, "The brethren shall be less than all men"—et in Minori—the words struck upon the ear of Francis with a new significance. Rising, he announced his desire that the brethren should be called "Fratres Minori," Brothers Minor, or, as they came to be called in England, Friars Minor.

Thus it was that the Order took its name; at the same time the position of the friars at Rivo Torto was daily becoming more difficult, a continuance of their stay at last seeming impossible. Francis decided to seek the friendly bishop, and to ask for the gift of a chapel, in the vicinity of which they might reside while daily using it for Mass and the recitation of their hours. In this, however, Bishop Guido was unable to assist them; but the Abbot of S. Benedetto, hearing of



ASSISI: THE TEMPLE OF MINERVA



### *The First Seal*

their need, immediately offered to Francis the beloved chapel of Santa Maria della Porziuncula. Thither the friars joyfully repaired, and had soon built about it a number of rude huts composed of wattles, plastered with mud and thatched, and otherwise comfortless, but suitable to poor penitents who were "less than all men." Here, then, in the cradle of their order, were the Friars Minor established, and the community, "born there by the merits of the Mother of God, there also by her aid received its increase." And yearly did Francis offer to the abbot of Monte Subasio, in fee for this priceless gift, a netful of fish and a measure of oil.

## CHAPTER XI

### Clare of the Scefì

Jesus Christ calls us all into His school to learn, not to work miracles nor to astonish the world by marvellous enterprises, but to be humble of heart. "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart."\* He has not called every one to be doctors, preachers, or priests, nor has He bestowed on all the gifts of healing the sick, raising the dead or casting out devils; but to all He has said, "Learn of Me to be humble of heart," and to all He has given the power to learn humility of Him.—FATHER CAJETAN MARY DA BERGAMO, Capuchin, 1692-1753.

**O**N one of the southern slopes of Monte Subasio stand the ruins of the ancient castle of "Sasso Rosso," the "Red Rock," in the year 1194 the property of Favorino Scefì,† Count of Sasso Rosso.

Count Favorino was the eldest of three brothers, all of whom were warlike and devoted to military exploits, and prompt with the assistance of their "bravi" to take up quarrels, or fling themselves into hot disputes with neighbours and with enemies. Favorino married Ortolana of the noble house of Fiumi, Counts of Sterpeto, a virtuous lady of strong faith who became a mother of saints. She bore her husband a son Boso and four daughters, Penenda married to one Martino Corano, a noble gentleman of Assisi; Clare and Agnes the future saints; and Beatrix, much younger than her sisters, who was afterwards beatified.

"Ortolana" means a cultivator or gardener, and the uncommon name borne by the mother of St Clare has struck some biographers as bearing a special significance; for she reared, as in an enclosed garden, tender plants for the courts of Heaven. The lady Ortolana had made a pilgrimage to the holy places of Jerusalem, visiting on her way thither Rome,

\* St Matt. ii, 29.

† Sometimes spelt Scifi.



## *Clare of the Scefi*

and the famous sanctuary of the Apparition of St Michael on Monte Gargano. Her goodness and charitable disposition gained the respect and love of all, rich and poor, who came in contact with her; and, as will be shown hereafter, she assumed in her widowhood the holy habit of religion, and joined her daughters in the Convent of S. Damiano.

A touching legend recounts how, shortly before the birth of St Clare, Ortolana, while praying before her crucifix, was strengthened and comforted by a heavenly message, bidding her be of good cheer. "For," said the voice, "thou shalt bear a lamp that shall give light to the whole earth;"\* and in memory of this vision Ortolana chose for her new-born child the name of Chiara, or Clare. The date of the Saint's birth was June 15, 1194; she was therefore twelve years younger than her spiritual father, St Francis.

From childhood Clare displayed a gentle disposition. She was born, declares a contemporary Franciscan, with a smile upon her lips, and from her earliest infancy she was taught by her mother to interest herself in the poor. "She gathered about her the outcasts, the feeble and the sick, rejoicing to see the increasing number of those who sought her aid. She held out her hand to alleviate their misery, and assisted them from her own abundance. Oh," exclaims her biographer, in the fullness of his heart, "surely such a child was an angel of God, an elect vase, a vase of gold filled with most exquisite perfumes, the odour of which, little by little, filled all the countryside. For the tale of her good deeds, performed for the pure love of God, flew from house to house, and whenever she moved through the city streets, the people would respectfully salute her, murmuring in tones full of admiration and affection, "'Tis Clare, the beloved daughter of Count Scefi.'"†

Thus Clare grew and developed in the stately home of her

\* Thomas of Celano, *Vita di Sta Chiara*.

† Thomas of Celano.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

ancestors, a house still to be seen on the left hand as one enters the city by Porta Vecchia. The palace windows to the east overlook the wide Piazza that now bears her name, and upon which stands the great Gothic church that is at once her sepulchre and the mother-convent of her Order. Her biographer declares that she was very beautiful, with long golden hair, finely chiselled features, and delicate complexion. Her parents, seeing her so fair, desired in their loving pride to establish her well in life, nor were suitors lacking for the hand of Count Scefi's lovely daughter; but heaven had otherwise decreed, and already the Spirit of God was directing the course that Clare was to pursue.

In the year 1210, when the Franciscan movement was already spreading far and wide, a certain young member of the house of Scefi, Rufino by name, is said to have received the habit of Friar Minor from the hands of St Francis. From this cousin Clare had doubtless heard much about the founder of this new and astonishing order of Penitents, who was then preaching a course of Lenten sermons in the Cathedral of S. Rufino. Clare with her mother and sister Agnes were regular attendants at these preachings, and the effect produced upon the already pious girl was very marked. She listened with all her soul to the searching yet homely words of the inspired preacher, and as the weeks wore on she longed to open her heart to the simple deacon who spake the words of eternal life. This desire Clare confided to a widowed relative, Buona Guelfucci—supposed by some to have been her aunt, by others the widow of a cousin—under whose care she sought and obtained an interview with Francis. This first interview was succeeded by several others, but the final call did not come until Palm Sunday, March 19, 1212. On that morning, Clare being then eighteen years of age, attended High Mass with her family in the cathedral, and a charming description of her costume on that occasion, taken from



ASSISI: THE MARKET BEFORE THE TEMPLE OF MINERVA



## *Clare of the Scefì*

contemporary chronicles, is given by Vincenzo Locatelli, the interesting Assisan biographer of the saint. She must have been attired, he says, in a long close-fitting tunic of scarlet cloth\*—the distinctive material and colour worn by young Assisan patricians—a head-dress of white lawn, and round her slender waist a gold and jewelled girdle. Thus Clare knelt in the half-finished cathedral, while the bishop, with words of peculiar appropriateness, blessed the branches of palm and olive: "Bless ☩, we beseech, O Lord, these branches of palm and olive; and grant that what Thy people this day bodily perform in Thy honour they may perfect the same spiritually with the greatest devotion by gaining a victory over the enemy, and loving exceedingly every work of mercy. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

When the time came for the palm branches to be distributed to the laity, all approached the altar save Clare, who continued kneeling in her accustomed place. The bishop, perceiving her complete abstraction, himself descended the sanctuary steps, and bending over the young girl gave her the olive branch. Moved beyond expression, Clare received the mystic symbol. At that moment she bade the world farewell, and, when the Mass was over, she accompanied her mother and sisters for the last time through the familiar streets leading to the Palazzo Scefì. Perfectly assured of her religious vocation, Francis had yielded to her earnest entreaties and had consented to give her that very night the habit of Penitence.

Of all her family Buona Guelfucci alone knew of her young kinswoman's decision, and she had promised to accompany Clare to Sta Maria della Porziuncula—or, as it had already begun to be called, Sta Maria degli Angeli—where she was to make her profession and receive the habit.

\* Scarlet cloth was one of the chief productions of Assisi, and Thomas of Celano describes the cloth sold by St Francis at Foligno as "*pannos scarulatos*."

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Although the great entrance doors of the Palazzo Scefi were securely closed and barred at night, there existed a small door opening upon the present Via Sta Chiara at the back of the house, and it was through this outlet that Clare intended to reach the street. This little door, high, narrow, and arched, may still be seen; and tradition declares that when, on the night of her profession, St Clare stole downstairs and tried the latch, she was surprised to find the door closed by a mysterious barrier of huge stones and logs of wood. Falling on her knees she besought Heaven for strength to overcome this last obstacle, and presently her prayer was answered and the door yielded. Locatelli says that "Buona Guelfucci and other honourable ladies" were awaiting her at the Palazzo Guelfucci, and so the little band of women set out for Sta Maria degli Angeli. At that period the most direct way to the Porziuncula led beneath Porta Sceni, now known as the "Portaccia," the gate which a hundred and fifty years later was walled and closed up after the brutal murder that occurred there of Blasco, Duke of Spoleto, and his son Garcia. From thence by country roads lighted by the Paschal moon shining through the quiet spring night, Clare and her companions gained Sta Maria degli Angeli.

And now, as they approached, torches flickered in the gloom, and the sound of triumphal chant and hymn rose upon their ears as Francis, followed by all his brethren, came out to meet their "sister." In the humble sanctuary of the friars, Clare made her solemn religious profession, and Francis clothed her with the coarse tunic of his Order, girded her with the hempen cord, and covered her head, from which the golden hair had fallen loose, with the black veil of penitence. Finally, the ceremony concluded, he placed the young novice under the care of the Benedictine nuns of S. Paolo.

To this convent came, next day, Favorino and Ortolana, deeply angered at the loss of this daughter, the flower of



## *Clare of the Scefì*

their flock ; and with tears and entreaties, even with threats, they implored her to renounce the religious life, and to return home. Clare, however, was immovable. Clinging to the altar, she uncovered her head, now shorn of its wealth of hair, and, while assuring her parents of her unalterable filial affection, exclaimed, in accents of deep emotion, "My Saviour is mine, and I am His ; my vows are irrevocable, and nothing in this world can sever me from His good service." Seeing her thus firm and steadfast, her parents at length desisted from their endeavours, and sorrowfully took their leave ; but later, to Clare's great joy, when time had healed their wounds, her mother and family would often come and visit her at S. Damiano, and, indeed, one old writer records, that sometimes, when Ortolana would lament over the loss of her daughters, Clare would console her in these words: "O mother mine, if I abandoned thee that I might embrace the religious life, I did so in order to unite thee to myself after a manner yet more intimate, and yet more perfect. Thou wilt have—yea, dear mother, I assure thee thou shalt yet taste—the joy of expiring in the arms of thy daughters." This latter prediction alluded, of course, to Ortolana's future religious life, and her own entry into the convent that already sheltered her three children.

So far, however, no arrangements had been thought of for Sister Clare beyond the immediate future ; but Francis, desiring to place her in a retreat more secluded than S. Paolo, arranged with the Benedictines for her reception in another convent of the Order, called S. Angelo di Panzo. Of this convent, which was situate in the country about a mile beyond the walls of Assisi, the ruins may still be seen in the plain between Assisi and Spello. To this retreat, therefore, Francis, accompanied by Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, and Brother Philip the Long, safely conducted their new sister in Christ.



## CHAPTER XII

# The Foundation of the Poor Clares

La divina bontà . . . . .  
. . . . ., ardendo in sè scintilla  
si, che dispiega le bellezze eterne.

*Paradiso*, vii, 64-6.

CLARE had not been long at the Convent of S. Angelo di Panzo before her sister Agnes, then aged fourteen, joined her. A very tender bond of affection united these two elder daughters of Favorino and Ortolana, both of whom were gifted with unusual intelligence, and both of whom later attained seraphic heights of holiness. From the scanty records available in regard to their home life we cannot now know whether Agnes shared her elder sister's aspirations, or whether, before the profession to Sta Maria della Angeli, she was aware of Clare's vocation for monastic life. Agnes, in any case, lost no time in seeking her sister at S. Angelo di Panzo, for to her also the call had now come to forsake all and follow Him who was humble of heart. Therefore, throwing herself into the arms of Clare, "Dearest Sister," she exclaimed, "teach me with thee to serve God."\*

Lovingly Clare consented, and instructing Agnes in the simple Rule that she herself had learned from the lips of Francis, the sisters spent a happy hour in conversing of heavenly things. A fortnight later Agnes returned to S. Angelo di Panzo, never again to return to the world. The flight of a second daughter filled Favorino and Ortolana—not yet recovered from the deep wound to their parental pride inflicted by Clare—with anger and despair. Determined to recover this second child at all costs, even if need were by force,

\* Thomas of Celano.

## *The Foundation of the Poor Clares*

Count Scefi appealed for assistance to his warlike brothers Monaldo and Paolo. Monaldo willingly undertook to restore Agnes to her father, and on a bright May morning accompanied by twelve men-at-arms and a band of volunteer relatives, rode out to S. Angelo di Panzo. But Agnes proved inflexible in her resolution, and neither did her uncle's persuasions avail, nor his threats terrify her. Infuriated at last, and deaf to the entreaties and prayers of Clare, Monaldo bore Agnes away by force from the convent, and with ill-treatment compelled the delicate young girl to accompany him to the place where men and horses awaited his return.

Her clothing, says the Legend, was soon in rags, and bleeding from many wounds, she was too spent even to cross a rivulet that flowed over the road. Monaldo therefore seized her in his arms in order to carry her across, but, "oh wonder! The fragile body weighed more heavily than lead," so that the strong man was at last compelled to let fall his burden. Again and again did his followers attempt to lift and carry Agnes, while the peasants working in the neighbouring field were also summoned to assist—but all in vain. Then Monaldo, beside himself with rage, raised his sword to slay his niece; but his arm withered to the elbow, falling powerless, while his sword dropped to the ground. At that moment Clare appeared, summoned by the cries and prayers of her little sister. "O miserable man and mad!" cried the saint as she perceived Agnes, helpless and bleeding on the ground, "Wouldst thou measure thy strength against the will of God?" Defeated and ashamed, Monaldo and his companions turned away, and leaving the sisters by the roadside, mounted and galloped off in the direction of Assisi.

Stooping over her sister, Clare raised her from the ground; at her touch the wounds of Agnes healed, and hand in hand they returned to the convent—Agnes rejoicing to have been found worthy to suffer for Christ's sake, and both

## *Assisi of St Francis*

giving thanks to God for His mercies. But Monaldo vainly sought remedies to restore his withered arm, until, terrified and broken by failure to obtain a cure, his proud heart melted within him and, humbled and penitent, he once more sought his nieces, and, through the prayers of Agnes, his arm was healed. Favorino also repented of his harshness, becoming reconciled to his daughters, he restored to them their portions, hitherto withheld. These they expended in gifts to the necessitous poor, and in needful improvements to the buildings of S. Damiano which had been previously bestowed upon St Francis by the friendly Benedictines of Monte Subasio, in order that they might become the convent of his second Order. The Benedictine Convent of S. Angelo di Panzo had proved unsuitable to the requirements of her Rule, and Clare was therefore glad to establish herself at S. Damiano where she could admit novices and properly observe the Rule.

Since the thirteenth century S. Damiano has passed through many vicissitudes, and in recent years has become a friary of Strict Observants, trained there for the foreign mission field. That portion of the building once occupied by St Clare and her nuns, which may still be visited by the public, can, however, have altered but little in aspect from what it must have been in 1212. The little sanctuary, so bare of ornament, and of rude material, carries the stamp of extreme poverty, and as the visitor wanders through the dim convent cells, the impression of the great love that these daughters of St Francis bore towards God assumes an increasing reality at each step.

In this, the first convent of the Poor Clares, the visitor or pilgrim may follow their daily life step by step. Here is the long dormitory, heavily beamed, with bare stone walls and floor, and at one end the window by which the barbarous troops of Frederic II hoped to force an entrance. There,



ASSISI: CHURCH OF S. DAMIANO



## *The Foundation of the Poor Clares*

adjoining the dormitory, is the Chapel of the Abbess, in which St Clare was permitted to reserve the Blessed Sacrament; and beside the altar is the tabernacle whence she lifted the ciborium on the occasion when, prostrated before it, and surrounded by her terrified daughters, she obtained the discomfiture of their assailants. In the southern wall of the oratory a tiny window, looking across a narrow terrace that once constituted the saint's garden, affords a glimpse of the great Umbrian plain, and of the mountains far beyond. Here Clare cultivated her roses and carnations, her lavender and rosemary with other sweet herbs, and from here also she could mark the peasants tilling the fields, and gaze afar over the wooded plain that held the Porziuncula. From this favourite retreat she must often have been summoned to the parlour, now used as the sacristy, where she would perhaps find Ortolana with the ardent child Beatrix, or Francis himself, come to consult on some important matter, or perhaps her cousin, Brother Rufino, upon whom Francis hesitated not to bestow the title of "Saint." Sometimes, again, it might be Brother Leo, "God's poor sheep," the beloved Confessor, bringing the abbess news of the holy father's health; or Brother Juniper, of whom he said, "Would I had a forest of such Junipers!" and in whose fervour and simplicity St Clare delighted. Often, indeed, must these dearest and closest friends have sat and conversed with the saintly abbess. Even to this day something of the perfume of holiness seems to cling to the little room and to the nuns' choir beyond, where yet remain the thirteen stalls of rough, unpolished wood, comfortless and rude of structure, enclosed by a vaulted roof and a stone-paved floor untouched in their primitive bareness. A more recently constructed choir for the use of the friars now separates the ancient choir of the "Poor Ladies" from St Clare's refectory, a long low-ceilinged hall, lighted by narrow windows, and presenting all the



## *Assisi of St Francis*

features of a poverty that never knew alleviation. Poverty, in its strictest and most absolute form, it was the fervent desire of St Clare that her rule should enforce; but when she first took up her abode at S. Damiano she had no direction in her new path beyond the verbal instructions imparted by St Francis. He had then been travelling much in Umbria, and had enlisted a large number of recruits to his Order. He had also instituted two chapters to be held annually at Assisi, at Pentecost and at Michaelmas. The first of these, which he had returned to the Porziuncula to attend, and at which the Rule of the Friars Minor had been discussed, and new missions decided upon, was then over.

Cardinal Ugolino Conti, afterwards Pope Gregory IX, a nephew of Pope Innocent III, who was at that time Cardinal Protector of all female religious Orders, appointed Francis director of the "Poor Ladies," as the second Order was then named. It was naturally the wish of Francis that Clare should fill the office of Abbess; but, writes Thomas of Celano, "She ever desired to obey and not to command," and it was only by solemn command of Francis himself, and after three years of religious life, that at last, in 1215, she consented to accept the title of Abbess.

The Rule of the "Poor Ladies" was not written when Francis was preparing to journey to the Holy Land, and after he had departed it was left for Cardinal Ugolino to draw up the Rule of the Second Order. This Rule of the Cardinal Protector, modelled on that of St Benedict, was most austere, imposing as it did perpetual fasting and silence, to be broken only by permission of the Abbess. It, however, permitted the nuns to possess goods in common, though this latter clause was in direct opposition to the teaching of Francis, who, on his return to Assisi, was implored by Clare and her nuns to intercede on their behalf with the Cardinal, that he might accord them a Rule of



## *The Foundation of the Poor Clares*

absolute poverty. This desired alteration was duly obtained by Francis, but, like that of the Friars Minor, it was only approved by the Pope *vivâ voce*. Later, Clare, as Abbess, again petitioned Innocent IV to confirm absolutely her Rule of perpetual poverty, but the Apostolic brief in which her request was granted reached her only when on her death-bed.

The young Abbess was but twenty years of age when she commenced her rule over S. Damiano; she lived yet twice as long again, and many women of all classes and ages received from her hands the black veil of perpetual penitence and poverty. Her sister Agnes was early called away by St Francis to reform the Convent of Sta Maria di Monte Celio, now Montecelli, near Florence, and an interesting letter from her to Clare at S. Damiano is extant, in which Agnes begs her sister to remind the famous Brother Elias of his duty more often to visit and console them.

After the departure of Agnes for Monte Celio other sisters were deputed to found, or reform, convents in various parts of Italy, and, later again, in foreign countries also. But the Abbess remained ever within the peaceful cloister on the slopes of the Umbrian mountain, the white convent which Thomas of Celano says "resembled a garden jewelled with flowers, a bower from whence was diffused a most sweet perfume of holy living." And this picture, it is well to remember, belongs to the terrible days of Frederic II and the tyrant Ezzelino of Padua.

## CHAPTER XIII

# The Apostolate

Poi che la gente poverella crebbe  
retro a costui, la cui mirabil vita  
meglio in gloria del ciel si canterebbe.

*Paradiso*, xi, 94-6.

**B**ETWEEN the years 1212 and 1216 Francis journeyed incessantly, always returning to Assisi for the Chapters of the Order. His first expedition to the Holy Land having failed owing to the loss of his ship in a gale, off the coast of Sclavonia, he was compelled to return to Italy, and landed at Ancona. Wherever he journeyed men begged to be admitted into his Order. "Rich and poor," writes Thomas of Celano, "noble and gentle, learned and ignorant, priests and laymen, men celebrated and men obscure, presented themselves one after the other and prayed that they might be permitted to join the brethren; no one was refused."

This constant growth of the new Order necessitated increased accommodation at the Porziuncula, and as Francis and his companions never returned from a mission without one or more fresh converts, the original dwellings became too small to house the growing numbers, and had to be enlarged, or others constructed. St Francis instituted no novitiate in his Order, but admitted the early friars without probation. A divine inspiration taught him how to direct these men of varied character, disposition, and temperament, and of every class and rank, so that he infused into their hearts his own pure and saintly spirit, "being in the midst of them as a true well-spring from whence each in turn drank of the living water of life."\*

\* Thomas of Celano.

## *The Apostolate*

Aboveall Francis never spared himself, but set an example of perfect self-sacrifice and devotion, working and praying day and night with ceaseless fervour for the welfare of souls and for the good of the Order. "He was right," remarks Thomas of Celano in his *Second Life*, "for that which a subordinate follows in his Superior is much rather the hand whereof he may perceive the works than the voice with which he heareth himself commanded or exhorted."

Wherever the fundamental principles of his Rule were concerned, Francis was severe. This was especially the case with all gifts of money, for he strictly forbade the friars ever to touch or handle gold and silver, and sternly insisted that all desiring to enter his Order should, as a first step, distribute their possessions among the poor, not among their own relations. As an example of his determination to carry out this precept, it is recorded that he refused to admit into the Order a certain rich man from the March of Ancona, who, to evade this rule, had parted his possessions among his family. When the holy man heard of this he severely rebuked him, saying: "Go thy way, Brother Fly, for thou hast in no wise gone forth from thy kindred and from thy father's house. Thou hast begun with thy flesh, and hast sought to raise a spiritual building upon a ruinous foundation."\* Brother Fly was a term of reproach frequently used by St Francis when alluding to the idle, the useless, and the self-indulgent, who he declared resembled flies—doing no good themselves, and spoiling the good done by their neighbours. To the poor and sick he was ever tender and loving, and while, faithful to his chosen spouse the Lady Poverty, he habitually practised personal austerities, he would spare those of his brethren who were young or weakly, commanding them by holy obedience to eat better food and to wear softer raiment. Mendicancy, he declared, should furnish the

\* St Bonaventura.

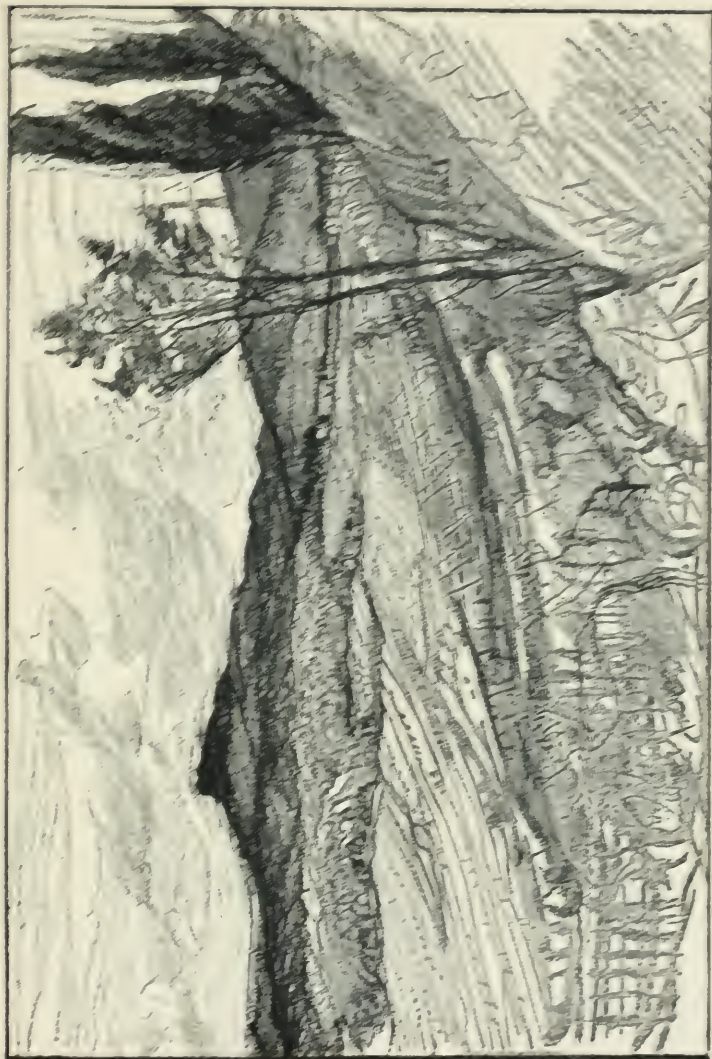
## *Assisi of St Francis*

Friars Minor with the principal means of subsistence. Such of the brethren, however, as could practise a trade were permitted to exercise it, receiving as remuneration the necessities of life, but no money; and whereas many friars of good birth and breeding felt keenly the ignominy attached to begging, Francis, perceiving this, would himself undertake the hard and vile task, gently rebuking his reluctant sons with these words: "The Son of God was far nobler than the noblest of us, yet He made Himself poor and of no account in this world. It is for love of Him that we in our turn have embraced poverty. We should, therefore, not be ashamed to have recourse to the Table of our Lord—the alms of the charitable."

In the earliest days of the Order the friars would spend their lives principally going from one lazaret-house to another; but as they became less itinerant they accepted from time to time, for temporary accommodation only, the loan of small houses situated in the suburbs of towns and villages. "This, then," writes Monsieur Paul Sabatier in his interesting notes to the *Speculum Perfectionis*, "was the condition of affairs in Tuscany and in Umbria about the year 1216." Many of these small dwellings of the early friars are still standing, as, for instance, Monte Ripido near Perugia, la Foresta at Rieti, l'Alvernia near Siena, and the convents of Greccio and Poggio Bustone. "A great similarity exists," continues Monsieur Sabatier, "between these various houses; and the traveller pursuing the road from Assisi to Spoleto may easily discern from their outward aspect these 'places' occupied by the early Franciscans and Poor Clares in the outskirts of towns and villages."\*

In the year 1213 Francis, accompanied by Brother Leo, travelled through the Romagna, reaping an abundant harvest of disciples; and among those converted while at Monte

\* *Speculum Perfectionis*, nunc primum edidit Paul Sabatier. Paris. 1898.



LAVERNA, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.





## *The Apostolate*

Feltro, now Monte Feltrio, was a certain nobleman, by name Orlando dei Cattani, Count of Chiusi in Casentino. This man, knowing that Francis had long desired some place of retreat to which he might retire unmolested when seeking rest and contemplation, bestowed on him as gift the mountain of "La Verna, then called Alvernia," situated in Tuscany.

In the following year, 1214, St Francis is alleged to have travelled to Spain, where he was struck down by so severe an attack of fever that, abandoning his intended mission to the Moors, he was constrained to return to Assisi.

In 1215 the Chapter of the Order was held at Pentecost, and the months succeeding this Chapter are the most obscure in the life of St Francis. He may, it is conjectured, have attended the Lateran Council held that year in Rome, and to this epoch also is assigned a period of great spiritual discouragement, increased by painful doubts as to the acceptability of his active religious service in the sight of almighty God. During the week succeeding the first approval of his Rule by Pope Innocent III Francis had hesitated in his choice between the contemplative and the active religious life; finally deciding that in the latter he could best obey the divine Will. Now, five years later, doubts and fears assailed him as to the righteousness of this decision, and in his perplexity and mental suffering he sent messengers to seek counsel of Brother Silvester, the priest, then in retreat in a secluded mountain spot, and also to obtain the advice of Sister Clare at S. Damiano. From each of these trusted friends the messenger friars brought back identical answers, "The divine will required the active religious life," and Francis forthwith prepared once more to depart upon his Master's work. On his journey he first visited Bevagna and Alviano, both near Assisi, and afterwards Marni, Rieti, Greccio, Fonte Colombo, and many other places



## *Assisi of St Francis*

both in Umbria and the neighbouring provinces. The following touching legend concerning the city of Todi may probably be traced to this journey. This story, which relates how the Foundling Hospital in Todi came to be established, is the more interesting since few legends are extant concerning the Saint and his dealings with children. On a certain day, while ascending the hill on which stands the western gate of Todi, St Francis met a woman descending towards the Tiber with a covered basket on her head. Questioned as to the contents of the basket, the woman, much embarrassed, replied, "Only a few poor garments which I would wash in the river." "Nay, nay," exclaimed the saint, "what thou bearest belongeth unto me and also to almighty God. Place therefore thy basket on the ground, that I may claim mine own." The woman tremblingly obeyed, and St Francis, uncovering the basket, lifted from it a new-born babe, thus saved by his intervention from the waters of the Tiber. Taking the infant in his arms, he gave it in charge to a good woman of the city, and later, says tradition, built with his own hands a cottage outside the walls to shelter the little child and its foster-mother. Thus was founded the Hospital for Foundlings of the city of Todi.

The influence of Francis daily increased throughout Italy, and his entry into town or village was a signal for the inhabitants to throng around him. Hardly would the slight, grey figure, accompanied by one or more companions, be seen nearing the town gate, before the news would spread, and the church bells ring out in joyous welcome. Sometimes the eager crowds pressed so closely round him that he was unable to protect his ragged cloak and tunic from the hands of those who struggled to tear off fragments to keep as precious relics of the saint. The sermons that he preached to these country folk were ever simple and to be understood of all. Sometimes he would speak

## *The Apostolate*

on the broad piazza of a busy town, sometimes from the pulpit of a little village church, as their Brother Francis, "your little one and servant." The same words which he spake 700 years ago may be read to this day among his writings. "Let us all, brothers, consider the Good Shepherd, who to save His sheep bore the sufferings of the Cross. The sheep of the Lord followed Him in tribulation and persecution and shame, in hunger and thirst, in infirmity and temptation and in all other ways; and for these things they have received everlasting life from the Lord."

Francis also exhorted the friars and the people to reverence and respect priests, because "they have power to change bread into the true Body of our Lord." He was, also, often heard to say: "If, some day, I met in company together a great saint from heaven and a humble little priest, I would run to kiss first the hands of that priest; and I would say to the saint, wait a moment for me, Saint Lawrence, for the hands of this man create the Living Word, and I must first do reverence to them."\*

In the year 1216 Francis and his Order lost their two most powerful patrons, Pope Innocent III and Cardinal John of S. Paolo, Bishop of Sabina. The loss of the last-named, who was Protector of the Order, was only second in importance to the loss of the great Pope himself. Innocent III, after a pontificate of eighteen years, died at Perugia on July 17, 1216. On the death of the Bishop of Sabina, Cardinal Ugolino, then Protector of the "Poor Ladies," immediately offered to fill the place of the late Cardinal—an offer most gratefully accepted by Francis; and entering immediately upon his office, the Cardinal at once proceeded to Assisi to visit Sta Maria degli Angeli and the brethren at the Porziuncula.

\* *Legenda di Jacopo da Voragine Aurea.*

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Thomas of Celano, describing this visit, records the deep impression made upon Cardinal Ugolino by all that he saw at the Porziuncula, and how he exclaimed to his attendants while examining the poor cells of the friars: "See where the good brothers sleep! Alas for us who to live at all need so much that is superfluous." \*

After the death of Innocent III, the Conclave, assembled at Perugia to elect a new Pope, chose Cardinal Cencio di Savelli, known as Honorius III, who at the very commencement of his pontificate endeavoured to press forward the Crusade preached by Innocent in the latter days of his life.

The Pontiff's appeal to the people to assist in reconquering the Holy Places deeply affected the Friars Minor, and Francis prepared to dispatch some of his friars to join the Crusaders under the leadership of Brother Elias of Cortona, that turbulent, ambitious spirit whose influence about this time began to make itself felt throughout the Order. This decision was taken at the General Pentecostal Chapter of 1217, a Chapter remarkable for two new Ordinances, under the first of which foreign missions were definitely formed, while under the other Italy was divided up into self-governing Franciscan Provinces.

Groups of friars were sent forth from the Porziuncula to evangelize and found friaries in Germany, Hungary, and Spain; while France was reserved as the field for the holy founder himself, "because in those days the French people had a greater devotion to the Blessed Sacrament of the altar than all other nations." †

Francis next appointed Ministers Provincial, for so he wished that those friars should be called who were to govern the new Provinces. Among others Brother Elias was now sent to Tuscany, and Brother Peter of Catania retained in

\* Thomas of Celano. *La Seconda Vita*. † Thomas of Celano.



ASSISI: STA. MARIA DEGLI ANGELI—THE PORZIUNCULA



## *The Apostolate*

Umbria. So soon as the labours of the Chapter were ended, Francis prepared to set forth on his journey to France. But, on his way thither, he passed through Florence, and visited Cardinal Ugolino, who dissuaded him from continuing his journey, and so clearly did the Cardinal point out the disadvantages likely to accrue from a prolonged absence on the part of the head of the Order that Francis returned to the Porziuncula.

At the same time the Order of "Poor Ladies" increased daily, for many women were flocking to S. Damiano to take the veil. There "Clare shone like a brilliant star in the Church of Christ," \* and from the humble white convent on the Umbrian hill-side the saintly Abbess sent forth little bands of valiant daughters to found houses of her Order in Spain, in Bohemia, in Hungary, and in France. Sister Agnes, also, had completed the reformation of Santa Maria di Monte Celli, near Florence, and was on her way to Mantua and Venice, that she might found houses there also. Buona Guelfucci, in religion Sister Pacifica, had joined her dearly-loved cousin at S. Damiano, and was to be followed there in 1225 by Ortolana, mother of the saint. Count Favorino dei Scefi had died in the year 1216; and his widow, it is believed, was among the first of those admitted by Francis into his Third Order, in 1221. Four years after that event Ortolana made her profession at S. Damiano, having first distributed her worldly goods among the poor, and confided her youngest daughter, Beatrice, to the care of her uncle, the converted Monaldo. Beatrice followed her mother into the religious life at the age of eighteen, and the names of many other members of the Scefi family may be found among the first Poor Clares. Among the best known of these remarkable women were Amata, daughter of Penenda Corano, who on the eve of marriage renounced an earthly for a heavenly

\* S. Bonaventura.



## *Assisi of St Francis*

Bridegroom; her two sisters, Francesca and Angeluccia, and the already mentioned Pacifica Guelfucci, Abbess of Vallegloria, near Spello.

In this convent of Vallegloria a community of Camaldolese Benedictine nuns had, in the year 1214, adopted the Rule of St Clare who, many years later, appointed Sister Pacifica to be their superior. At that time the convent was but half built; the former Abbess, B. Balbina dei Offreducci—a noble family of Spello—died before she had completed the projected house, and Sister Pacifica finished the work. As the building progressed, difficulties arose as to the obtaining of a sufficient water supply, for all that the nuns had to depend upon was one small cistern. Sister Pacifica and Brother Andrew of Spello, a well-known religious, therefore exhorted the nuns to entreat almighty God in their necessity; and after many days spent in prayer and fasting there suddenly appeared in the quadrangle of the cloisters, when the nuns were walking in the cool of the evening, a beautiful white doe, lovelier than any doe ever seen in the surrounding forest. Striking the ground with her hoof, she disappeared, and lo! from the spot struck by her hoof gushed forth a stream of pure water. Therefore, and to this day, is the convent well at Vallegloria named “Fonte dei Miracoli.”

From Vallegloria the Abbess Pacifica returned to S. Damiano, where, in the year 1253, she was among the nuns who gathered round the death-bed of St Clare. At S. Damiano also, five years later, being then in her ninetieth year, Pacifica followed her beloved superior into eternal rest. She was afterwards beatified.

## CHAPTER XIV

# Progress of the Order

Di seconda corona redimita  
fu per Onorio dall' eterno spiro  
la santa voglia d' esto archimandrita.

*Paradiso*, XI, 97-99.

THE religious movement inaugurated by St Francis of Assisi was of a nature hitherto unknown in the history of the Christian Church, the monastic ideal, until he began to organize his Order of Friars Minor, having pursued a different aim. Heretofore the monks, living in communities apart from the people, had exercised an important educational and civilizing power as supporters of law and order—frequently as the only examples of such order—in a lawless age. But the areas affected by these several communities were purely local and restricted. With the advent of the friars, on the contrary, a wider, more personal, and individual influence came to be established, for the new monks mingled with the people and entered into their interests. Their friaries were places of rest rather than monasteries of strict community life. Thus arose that new democratic spirit which was destined to develop, in process of time, our modern civilization by drawing all classes together; and this movement was particularly encouraged and strengthened by the establishment of the Third Order. “Fishers for the souls of men,” the brethren did not abide in their houses and let men come to them; following the example of their founder, and therein the very teaching of Christ, they went out “and compelled them to come in.”

In the year 1217 occurred an event as important in the

## *Assisi of St Francis*

annals of Assisi as in those of the entire Catholic world. Shortly before the departure of St Francis on his mission to France there was granted through him the "Great Indulgence of the Porziuncula," sometimes termed "the Great Pardon of St Francis." The manner of its granting was, says tradition, that as the saint was fervently praying, one summer night in his cell for the conversion of sinners, a voice commanded him forthwith to repair to Perugia, where, casting himself at the feet of the Pope Honorius III, he should ask an indulgence for the humble Chapel of Sta Maria degli Angeli.

Accompanied by Brother Masseo of Marignano, Francis next morning obediently proceeded to Perugia, obtained audience of the Pope, and respectfully addressed him thus: "Holy Father, no long time past I restored and placed in good repair the church, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Christ, known as Santa Maria, in the plain of Assisi in thy dominion. Deign, I beseech your Holiness, to enrich this little church with a precious Indulgence on the anniversary of its dedication, August 2, without obligation of almsgiving." "We consent to thy petition," the Pope immediately replied; "but tell us, Brother Francis, for how many years dost thou require this Indulgence? for three, for six, for seven years perchance?" And the humble friar responded: "Holy Father, I beg thee to give me not years but souls. It is my most earnest desire that the faithful who shall visit the Porziuncula on the anniversary of the dedication of Sta Maria degli Angeli shall obtain entire remission of all sins committed since baptism until that hour." "That which thou demandest," cried the Pope, "our predecessors would never have accorded thee." But Francis replied: "I ask not for this Indulgence, Holy Father, in my own name, but in the name of Christ our Lord, who sends me to thee." Then Honorius hesitated no longer, but cried: "Placet



ASSISI, FROM THE ROAD TO PERUGIA



## *Progress of the Order*

mihi quod habeas, concedo; quod ita sit, fiat in nomine Domini."

The Cardinals present at this interview were greatly disturbed, fearing lest such an indulgence should prove prejudicial to the pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and to the Roman basilicas. They, therefore, used their utmost endeavours to persuade the Pope to recall his concession. But Honorius was firm, and declared: "We revoke naught of that we have granted." To pacify the Cardinals, however, he limited the Indulgence of the Porziuncula to one day only—from first Vespers on August 1, to first Vespers on August 2. On hearing this final decision of the Supreme Pontiff, Francis bowed low before him, and turned to leave; but the Pope cried after him: "How now, Brother Francis! thou leavest suddenly with no provision of document." "Holy Father," responded Francis, "this Indulgence being the work of God, He will be my guarantee. I am satisfied, and require no brief; rather let us entreat our Blessed Lady to be the charter, our Lord Jesus Christ the notary, and the angels of heaven witnesses."

On their way from Perugia to Assisi Francis and Brother Masseo passed the night in the lazar-house of a little hamlet named Colle. According to his custom the saint rose at midnight to pray for the salvation of souls; and calling Brother Masseo, he confided to him that, while thus praying, it had been revealed to him that the Indulgence of the Porziuncula was confirmed in Heaven so soon as it had been granted to him by the Vicar of Christ on earth. Later, he made a like confidence to Brother Leo, but this revelation he commanded him to keep secret until he (Francis) should have died.

On August 2, 1217, before a vast concourse of people, the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli was duly consecrated by seven bishops. Canon law required that indulgences should be promulgated only at the consecration of basilicas:



## *Assisi of St Francis*

it was, therefore, by special licence of the Pope that the great Indulgence of the Porziuncula was then announced.

On his return from Florence to the Porziuncula, Francis had dispatched as missionaries to France, to take his place, Brother Pacificus and Brother Agnellus of Pisa. The former was a man of knightly birth, and of rare and delicate gifts, a poet who had been crowned "King of Verse" by the Emperor Frederic II.

The latter has especial claim to the interest of Englishmen, since he was chosen by Francis as chief of the missionaries sent to England in 1224. Of all the "Obediences" or credentials given by St Francis to the brethren whom he sent upon missions, that in which he thus appointed Brother Agnellus has alone survived to our days: "I, Brother Francis of Assisi, Minister General," it reads, "by holy obedience, do command thee, Brother Agnellus of Pisa, to proceed to England, there to exercise the office of Minister Provincial. God be with thee." A little later, Brother Thomas of Eccleston has recorded that "In the eighth year of the lord King Henry, son of John, on the Tuesday after the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, which that year fell upon a Sunday, the Friars Minor first arrived in England, landing at Dover."

The year 1218 Francis again spent in journeying through Italy and in visiting Rome, where, for the first time, he met Dominic Guzman, founder of the Order of the Friars Preachers. With Cardinal Ugolini Dominic subsequently attended the Michaelmas Chapter General of this year.

The life of St Dominic offers, in all its details, a strong contrast to that of St Francis. He was a Spanish noble, and as, according to tradition, he was predestined for the religious life, he never experienced that mysterious travail of the soul known as "conversion." Becoming a priest, he

## *Progress of the Order*

passed the greater portion of his life in France and Italy, combating heresies and establishing his Order of Friars Preachers.

The legend relating to the first meeting between the two holy patriarchs runs thus: St Dominic and St Francis being both in Rome at the time of the great Lateran Council of November 10, 1214, St Dominic, praying one night in the basilica of St Peter, beheld a vision of our Lord holding in His hand three flaming darts with which He was about to exterminate the proud, the avaricious, and the unchaste. Our Blessed Lady, prostrating herself before Him, interceded for these evil-doers, and in order to avert His wrath, presented to her divine Son two men, saying: "Behold, these Thy faithful servants will renew the faith of the world, and through them shall the evangelical virtues once more flourish upon earth." In one of these two men Dominic recognized himself; the second was quite unknown to him.

When morning broke, he quitted the basilica, and as he passed through its portals he beheld a poor ragged man, in whose features he recognized the stranger of the vision. Running towards him with tears of joy, Dominic greeted and embraced St Francis, exclaiming: "Thou art my comrade; let us labour together. If we are united, no man shall prevail against us." Thus it was that the friendship which is still traditional between the Orders founded by these holy patriarchs was born and cemented.

Readers of the *Paradiso* of Dante will remember how the divine poet listens to the life-story of Francis of Assisi from the lips of St Thomas Aquinas, and from St Bonaventura learns the story of Dominic of Calaroga. *The Fioretti*, again, relate how Dominic was so greatly struck by the devotion of the Friars Minor to "The Lady Poverty," that at the General "Chapter of Mats" he imposed the strict observance

## *Assisi of St Francis*

of this salutary virtue upon his Order also.\* And, on his death-bed at Bologna, on August 6 of the same year (1221), having delivered his last will and testament to the assembled sorrowing community, St Dominic closed it with the words: "Have charity, guard humility, and make your treasure out of voluntary poverty."

The Michaelmas Chapter of 1218, which left no special mark upon the history of the Friars Minor, was chiefly noteworthy for the return of the foreign missionaries, who, except in Portugal, had everywhere experienced an unfriendly reception. In Germany this had amounted to sad ill-treatment, nor is this wholly surprising when their complete ignorance of the German tongue is remembered. Communication between the missionaries and the inhabitants being almost impossible, frequent misunderstandings and contention easily arose; the friars were first thrown into prison, and then ignominiously expelled. Francis, however, was much troubled by this report, on hearing which he groaned aloud and cried: "These undertakings are indeed far too great for Brother Francis."† Hereafter, he decided, all friars Missioners must be provided on their journeys with Letters Apostolic from Rome. These credentials he subsequently obtained through the good offices of the Cardinal Protector.

At the Chapter General of Pentecost, 1219, Francis determined to join the Crusade organized by Honorius III, and also to send missionaries to Morocco and Spain. The Spanish mission, however, failed so completely that its chief, Brother Giles, was compelled to abandon the work and return to Assisi.

On June 24 of the same year Francis, accompanied by several of the friars, embarked at Ancona for Egypt.

\* The statement that St Dominic was present at the Chapter of Mats, 1221, although quoted from the *Little Flowers*, is contradicted by modern research.

† Thomas of Celano.

## *Progress of the Order*

They found the Christian army encamped before Dami-etta under John de Brienne, brother of that Walter under whose banner Francis had many years before taken service. The famous interview, the subject of so many pictures, between St Francis and the Soldan of Egypt took place on this occasion. It is also said, and the tradition is generally accepted in the Order, that after the fall of Dami-etta the saint and his companions visited the Holy Land.

The spring of 1220 again found Francis at the Porziuncula, and at the following Michaelmas, greatly encouraged and strengthened by the flourishing condition in which he found the Order on his return to Italy, he presided over the usual Chapter General.

The friars had everywhere rapidly increased in numbers under the powerful protection of Cardinal Ugolini. Pope Honorius also, on taking the French Province under the immediate protection of the Holy See, had addressed to the bishops, abbots, and prelates of France the following strong letter: "We notify afresh to each one of you our approval of this Order, and our recognition of its members as Catholics and men of holy life."

Moving as this must have been to the founder of the Order, a yet keener emotion—doubtless the most poignant experienced by Francis and his friars since the birth of the Order—arose from a dispatch received about this time. In this dispatch was conveyed the news of the martyrdom of the five friars who had been sent to Morocco on a mission to the Moors. The names of these five first martyrs were Berardus of Carbio, Peter of S. Gemignano, Otho, Ajutore, Accurse. As no local designation is affixed to their names, the three last were probably men of Assisi or its neighbourhood. The friars had suffered much under the Sultan of Morocco, and the account of their death had reached Lisbon from Don Pedro of Portugal, who, having quarrelled with

## *Assisi of St Francis*

his brother, King Alphonso, had sought refuge at the Moorish Court. An officer attached to the person of Don Pedro brought the news to the Bishop of Lisbon and the Minister General of the Portuguese Province, who immediately forwarded it to the Porziuncula. Deeply affected by the sufferings of these the first among the brethren to shed their blood for the faith, Francis, the tears streaming from his eyes, exclaimed: "Behold our first-born! Behold those whom above all others we may claim as our true brethren!"

At the Michaelmas Chapter following these events, conscious that his strength was now declining, and feeling also that the burden of government was heavier than he could bear, Francis solemnly resigned the Minister-Generalship of the Order, appointing in his place Brother Peter of Catania, his faithful early companion. But the distress of the friars was such, and they implored him so ardently to retain at least the title, and certain rights appertaining to the Minister-General, that in deference to these wishes Brother Peter was appointed to the somewhat less important position of Vicar-General. Kneeling before the Vicar-General, then, Francis took the oath of obedience in the presence of the assembled community, afterwards praying aloud for the Order in the following words: "O my most sweet Saviour, to Thee I confide this Thy family, the which, unto this day, Thou gavest into my care. Thou knowest that my many infirmities no longer permit me to govern; I therefore leave my brethren to the care of the Custodes, and to Thee, Lord God, shall they render account if by negligence, by bad example, or by excessive tyranny, they cause anyone of these Friars Minor to perish miserably."

Brother Peter of Catania died very shortly after his appointment, and was buried in Sta Maria degli Angeli in March, 1221, and at the Pentecostal Chapter General following—the famous "Chapter of Mats"—Brother Elias of Cortona was

## *Progress of the Order*

elected his successor. This curious name—"Chapter of Mats"—was derived from the coverings woven of willow wands and rushes, which were used in the construction of the innumerable small huts erected around the Porziuncula for the accommodation of the 5,000 persons who, as S. Bonaventura records, attended this Chapter. An old legend records that the Assisians viewed with astonishment and pride the plain below their walls dotted all over with these curious little huts in which were grouped the friars according to their several provinces. The citizens vied with the inhabitants of Perugia, Spoleto, Foligno, Spello, and the surrounding districts in bringing into the camp of the friars such abundance of provisions and of comforts of every description, that the Chapter was continued two whole days in order that everything might be consumed. For Francis, true to his principle that the Friars Minor should supply the spiritual needs of the people, while the people in return should provide for the bodily necessities of the friars, had forbidden that any special provision should be made for the maintenance of the assembled multitude.

On this memorable occasion the Chapter was attended by Cardinal Reynerio, to meet whom the friars went out in procession some distance from the Porziuncula. Dismounting from his horse when he met them, this Prince of the Church, who above his purple wore the poor grey frock of St Francis, accompanied the friars barefoot to Sta Maria degli Angeli. Here he passed some time in devotion, and on the same evening after Vespers accompanied Francis in his visits to the huts, inspecting all the arrangements for the Chapter. Pleased and astonished with all that he saw, Reynerio, turning to the saint, exclaimed: "Truly may we, brother Francis, call this the camp of the Lord." Next morning the Cardinal celebrated Mass of the Holy Ghost, and Francis sang the gospel of the day. Preaching



## *Assisi of St Francis*

afterwards to his Order, their founder began his sermon with the words: "My sons, great are the things promised unto us from God; Aye, and great are the things promised unto us do we observe even that whereof we have made promise unto Him. Brief are the delights of this world, and perpetual the pain which follows after them; little are the pains of this life, but infinite the glory of the life to be."

Among the multitude assembled at this "Chapter of Mats" was St Anthony of Padua.



RIVO TORTO, ASSISI: PROCESSION OF ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA



## CHAPTER XV

# The Ultimate Seal

Nel crudo sasso, intra Tevere ed Arno,  
da Cristo prese l' ultimo sigillo,  
che le sue membra due anni portarno.

*Paradiso*, xi, 106-8.

**I**T has not been possible within the limited space of this work to do more than pass in very rapid review the many events in the life of St Francis, and for the same reason it is only possible to consider very briefly the actual Rule he gave, as well as the personal gifts and characteristics which have endeared him so greatly to the heart of the Christian world. In Francis all living creatures may truly be said to have found a friend and benefactor; his great heart embraced all the men and women who sought his sympathy and advice, and his pity for the dumb helplessness of suffering animals was deep and true. He would lift the worm from his path, lest a careless foot should crush it, and would encourage his "little sister grasshopper" to perch upon his hand and chirp her song to his gentle ear. He tamed the fierce wolf of Gubbio, and fed the robins with crumbs from his table, and it will be remembered how, at Greccio, he instituted the beautiful devotion of the Christmas presepio (crib).

The lavish beauty of nature around him touched a corresponding joyous chord in his breast; he rejoiced in "brother fire," in the sun and moon, in plants and trees and sky; he blessed the Creator for all the loveliness of his native Umbria, and he even welcomed at the last his "sister, the death of the body."

This wide personal sympathy, strengthened by the spiritual grace and supernatural gifts which—as we may say—

## *Assisi of St Francis*

radiated from his pale, emaciated person, embracing one and all, led to the establishment of his "Third Order of Penitents," or Tertiaries—an association open to all classes and conditions of life.

The far reaching consequences, and the great importance of the Rule given by Francis to this, his "Third Order," may be judged by the following three articles. First, a Tertiary was forbidden to carry arms except in defence of the Faith or of his country, or by permission of his Superior. Secondly, he was to abstain from taking any solemn oath save by constraint of necessity, or within the limits laid down by the Holy See. Thirdly, each Tertiary was bound to contribute yearly a "denier" in money towards a fund for the relief of any destitute Brother or Sister of Penitence.

In this Third Order, into which St Francis received the first members in the year 1221, at the little Tuscan town of Poggio Bonsi, in a chapel given to him by the Sienese, thousands of men and women hastened to enrol themselves. Its initiation immediately provoked an outcry from the nobles, who, seeking by every means in their power to preserve their ancient privileges, strove to stifle the new Order at its birth. But the new Franciscan spirit was already proving its strength. The Tertiaries appealed to the local bishops and to the Holy See, and although success did not crown their first endeavours, Pope Gregory IX presently took them under his own protection and instructed the bishops to "Permit no one to molest the Tertiaries." The Feudal System was too deeply and too widely rooted to be immediately affected, yet of all the several shocks that finally broke its power, few perhaps struck deeper than this single sentence of the Pope. Its effect was to increase the power of the people throughout civilized Europe, and every increase in the power of the people—the middle classes of the future—tended to diminish and reduce the power of feudalism.

## *The Ultimate Seal*

Fourteen years had elapsed since the foundation of the Friars Minor, and as yet they possessed only the original Rule—termed the “Form of Life”—to which Pope Innocent III had given his sanction *vivâ voce*. But now, writes St Bonaventura: “Seeing that the Order and Form of Life already approved by Pope Innocent was greatly enlarged and increased, Francis desired to rewrite his Rule and to obtain its confirmation by Honorius III.” A divine revelation vouchsafed him one night in a vision further strengthened Francis in this determination. It seemed to him that “he was gathering from the ground some very small morsels of bread, and being about to distribute these among many hungry friars who were about him, misdoubting how he might so distribute such small pieces that none should fall from his hands, he heard a voice from heaven that said: ‘Francis, make one Host of all these pieces, and give to as many as desire to receive!’ And when he had thus done, all such as received that Host without devotion, or despised the offered Gift, were immediately made lepers.” The mystical meaning of this vision remained unrevealed until the following day, when, continues St Bonaventura: “He again heard the same voice from heaven.” “The crumbs of bread which thou didst see last night are the words of the Gospel; the Host is the Rule; the leprosy is sin.” Acting upon this interpretation, Francis immediately prepared to rewrite the Rule, but in a shorter form. For this purpose, accompanied by two friars, he retired to a hermitage in the mountains, supposed to have been Sta Maria delle Carceri, where, with prayer and fasting, he caused a Rule to be written in accordance with the revelation given to him.

His task accomplished, Francis returned to the Porziuncula, and committed the Rule to the keeping of his vicar-general. But Brother Elias, the ambitious disciple, did not find the new Rule to his liking, and when asked for it a few



## *Assisi of St Francis*

days later, he declared it to have been unfortunately lost. Without a word of complaint, the patient Francis recommenced his labours.\* With Brother Leo and Brother Bonizio of Bologna he this time retired to a mountain—traditionally identified with Monte Colombo near Rieti—on which stood one of those numerous hermitages of which the retired peacefulness always appealed to him, especially at this period of his life.

Of these isolated friaries and hermitages the most easily accessible from Assisi is probably that of Sta Maria delle Carceri, some four kilometres distant from the town. The road from Porta Cappuccini to the wild mountain ravine on the steep slopes of which the Carceri hangs like an eagle's nest is rough and steep, though easily practicable to the pedestrian, whose labours are rewarded by magnificent views as the road climbs ever upwards, across the wooded and precipitous slopes that drop steeply to the plain. At first the stony path is bordered by many a sweet-scented flower and aromatic herb. Tall thistles and yellow hawkweed, several varieties of wild cistus, and innumerable hawthorn bushes, pink and white, spread their branches under the stunted oak trees. But all signs of vegetation disappear from the higher mountain slopes, so that the visitor to the hermitage is surprised to find that the "Carceri" itself is surrounded by woods so thick, while the trees and bushes have so closely occupied every inch of root-hold, that it is impossible to see the torrent which murmurs in the depth of the gorge below.

A gateway of stone gives access to the hermitage and admits the visitor to the inner court and to the monks' cells. These are partly hewn out of the living mountain side; indeed the hill is perforated with grottoes, every one of which is associated traditionally with the early companions of St Francis. Beneath the chapel is a double grotto, once reserved

\* *Speculum Perfectionis*, 1.



ASSISI: HERMITAGE OF THE CARCERI



## *The Ultimate Seal*

for the Seraphic Patriarch himself, and within it may be seen the hard couch, formed by a ledge in the rock, on which he passed the few hours that he would allow himself for sleep. Beyond lies the oratory, to which he retired for prayer and spiritual communion. At the time when Francis first sojourned at Sta Maria delle Carceri, the friary did not exist, and the only building on the spot was a small chapel owned by the Benedictines of Monte Subasio, and probably erected by them for the use of the mountain shepherds.

Francis, who from time to time loved to seek the beautiful solitudes abounding in the neighbourhood of his birth-place, came one day to this Chapel of our Lady, and grew so fond of the quiet beauty of the gorge that, in the year 1215, he begged the shrine from the abbot of Monte Subasio. Obtaining his request, he afterwards formed the habit of frequently retiring there for days together, undisturbed save by the songs of the birds. They, according to the legend, were wont to perch in great numbers upon an oak tree just outside the saint's grotto, and to greet him with joy when, coming forth, he bade them sing praises to their Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth. On this tree they would remain singing until the saint, making the sign of the cross, blessed them, and gave them permission to depart.

Close to the grotto of St Francis is the grotto of Brother Rufino, who—as was revealed to the holy father—was one of the three souls dearest to God upon earth. Beyond, approached by a small flight of steps cut out of the rock, is the grotto of Brother Masseo of Marignano, while lower still are the caverns that were used from time to time by Brother Bernard of Quintavalle, Brother Giles, and Brother Sylvester the Priest. At the hermitage of the Carceri Brother Sylvester is said to have received the messengers sent by Francis to inquire the manner of life most pleasing to al-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

mighty God; and here also, in the rude cavern of which the rocky sides and stony floor remain untouched, it is probable that Francis wrote the second Rule, derived from the Gospel, that was confirmed by a Bull of Pope Honorius III in 1223. This Rule granted many privileges to the Order, and is still observed by the Friars Minor.\*

As Francis declined in health, so did he spend more and more time in retreat, his devotion and zeal increasing as bodily strength decreased. Clare from her convent of S. Damiano watched over him with loving care, her hands fashioned his clothing and prepared medicines for his use; while, later still, she made sandals for his feet and supplied bandages and ointment for the wounds imprinted by the Seraph of La Verna after the likeness of the wounds of Christ.† The abbess, in her peaceful retreat far from the tumult of the world, had yet one fervent wish—she longed to eat once more with her spiritual father and brethren.

There were at that time no regulations forbidding such a meeting as that proposed by Clare, for the constitutions enjoying the strict clostration of the “enclosed” Orders were made at a much later date.‡ Francis at first refused to entertain the request, but yielding to the prayers of the friars that he should grant this “favour and consolation,” he finally consented, saying: “Since thus it seems to you well, so also seems it good to me. But, that she may be the more consoled, I will that she sit to eat with me at St Mary of the Angels, for in that she has been so long secluded at S. Damiano so much the more shall be her joy to see the place of the Blessed Mary, wherein she was shorn, and made the spouse of Jesus Christ. There shall we eat together in the name of God.”

\* See Father Paschal Robinson's *The Writings of St Francis*, Dent, 1906.

† The Stigmata.

‡ By Pope Boniface VIII, who occupied the Chair of St Peter from 1284 to 1303.

## *The Ultimate Seal*

Clare, therefore, accompanied by one companion, repaired on the appointed day to Sta Maria degli Angeli, and, having prayed on the spot where she had received the holy habit of Religion, she entered the house in which Francis had caused a meal to be prepared. "And the hour for meat being come, they seated themselves together, St Francis and St Clare, and one of the companions of St Francis with the companion of St Clare. And all the other companions humbly seated themselves round the table. And at the first dish St Francis began to talk of God in a manner so sweet, so admirable, and so sublime, that there descended upon them the abundance of divine grace, and they were all ravished in God."

The *Fioretti*, from which the above account is taken, then recounts how the men of Assisi and Bettona beheld that evening Sta Maria degli Angeli, and the house, and the wood leading up to the house, brightly burning. "Running thither with great haste to extinguish the flames, they entered and found St Francis and St Clare with all their company, sitting about a humble table and ravished in the contemplation of God."

Then, "well escorted," Clare returned to S. Damiano, to the great joy and relief of the community, waiting in fear, remembering how St Francis once said to St Clare: "Be ready, in case I have need to send thee to another house." She then, as the daughter of Holy Obedience, had answered, "Father, I am always ready to go wheresoever thou wilt send me." "Therefore the sisters rejoiced greatly when they saw her again, and from this also St Clare received much consolation."

After the dispatch of the mission to England, Francis, accompanied by Brother Elias, returned to Umbria, and preached in various cities. They were lodging near Foligno one night, when Brother Elias saw in a vision an old man



## *Assisi of St Francis*

of priestly and venerable appearance, clad in a white garment, who accosted him with these words: "Rise, brother, and announce to Brother Francis that eighteen years have now passed since he renounced the world and gave himself wholly to our Lord. Say also unto him that there remain yet but two years before that God shall call him to Himself."\* Profoundly moved by this mystical warning, Francis at once made arrangements to return to Assisi, that he might thence depart into a solitary place, wherein "he might resign himself to the will of God, and purify himself from the soil which yet clung to him from his traffic with men."\*

For this retreat Francis chose Monte La Verna, and thither he journeyed with four of his best-beloved friars, "men of virtue," writes Thomas of Celano—who, however, refrains from mentioning their names, for fear of wounding their humility—"devoted to God's service, dear to His Saints, gracious in all their dealings with their fellow-men."

These four friars are generally believed to have been Masseo—who directed the party—Rufino, Angelo Tancredi and Leo. The great heat of August so overwhelmed Francis that after two days of travelling he could no longer proceed on foot; an ass was, therefore, provided for him. Arrived at the hermitage, they found that Count Orlando had prepared for his use a little hut somewhat apart from those provided for the brethren; but as he desired a yet more perfect solitude, he penetrated still further into the wild and dense forest. There, on the feast of the Assumption of our Lady, August 15, 1224, Francis began to keep the Lent of St Michael the Archangel. And now, in the touching words of the "Three Companions": "Since he did bear in his heart the fervour of love and continual remembrance of Christ's Passion, the Lord Himself, being minded to make manifest the same unto all the world, did adorn him

\* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*.

## *The Ultimate Seal*

in marvellous wise, while yet living in the flesh, with the special privilege of a singular distinction. For while in seraphic ardour of desire he was uplifted toward God, and by the sweetness of contemplating His Passion was transfigured in the likeness of Him who of His exceeding love was willing to be crucified—on a morning, about two years before his death and nigh unto the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross,\* while he prayed upon the side of the mountain that is called Alvernia, there appeared to him a seraph having six wings, and between the wings bearing the form of a most beautiful man crucified, whose hands and feet were stretched out after the manner of a cross, thus most evidently setting forth the image of the Lord Jesus. And with twain wings he veiled his head, and with twain the rest of his body, and twain were spread forth to fly. And when the vision was now past, a wondrous flame of love abode in his heart, but yet more wondrously there were found upon his flesh marks of the Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ. And these although, in so far as might be, the man of God concealed unto his death, not being minded to make public the sacred mystery of the Lord, nevertheless he could not entirely hide it, but that it became known, at the least unto his most intimate companions.”

In these simple yet soul-stirring words, Angelo, Rufino, and Leo, “who, albeit unworthy, held converse with him for some long time,” recount the awful mystery of “the last seal’s impress” received from his Saviour by the beloved servant of God on the rugged Tuscan mountain. And, writes St Bonaventura: “Because of these Stigmata of the Lord Jesus Christ, to thee let every servant of Christ bear tender and devoted affection; may God, who did in various ways show forth the wonderful mystery of the cross in blessed Francis, grant us ever to follow the ensample of his devotion. Amen.”

\* September 14.

## CHAPTER XVI

# The Death of St Francis

Quando a colui ch' a tanto ben sortillo  
piacque di trarlo suso alla mercede,  
\* \* \* \* \*

ai frati suoi . . . .

raccomandò la sua donna più cara,  
e comandò che l'amassero a fede;

*Paradiso*, xi, 109-114.

ON September 30, 1224, Francis quitted the mountain of La Verna and returned to the Porziuncula. This time he journeyed on horseback, proceeding with his four companions first to the hermitage of Monte Casale above Borgo S. Sepolcro, and thence on to Sta Maria degli Angeli. In every little village and town through which he passed the enthusiasm excited by his presence exceeded all former demonstrations, the people, flocking around him, kissed the hem of his frock, and endeavoured to embrace the wounded hands and feet which he assiduously concealed from them. Long before he reached the Porziuncula, his progress had become a veritable triumph. His physical condition was very serious—quite beyond the medical science of his day—and he was almost totally blind. His zeal and energy, however, showed no signs of diminution, and besides expressing his intention of renewing his early ministrations in the Lazar houses, he also commenced that missionary journey through southern Umbria which was destined to be his last.

The wounds in his feet made walking impossible. St Bonaventura writes of this period: "Francis being thus crucified with Christ . . . thirsted with Christ crucified for the salvation of a multitude of souls. Now in that he could not walk on foot because of the nails which were in his feet,



ASSISI: STA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI—THE PORZIUNCULA



## *The Death of St Francis*

it happened that he was obliged to be carried through the cities and other places whither he desired to go that he might encourage others to carry the Cross of Christ."

This picture of the dying saint, strong in his burning love for the souls of men, surmounting almost intolerable bodily weakness and suffering in order to carry his divine message, cannot but stir our emotions, and is as a living voice testifying through the generations to the constraining love of Christ who giveth strength to His beloved servants. Many miracles now began to be wrought by St Francis through the efficacy of the sacred stigmata, the precious secret of which he so earnestly desired to screen from the eyes of all men. Thus, says tradition, after that morning of ecstasy upon Mount La Verna, storms of hail—that dreaded scourge of the Italian farmer—ceased to devastate the crops in the immediate vicinity of the holy mountain. Or, again, when Francis sojourned once at Rieti, the water in which he bathed his hands and feet was found to heal diseased cattle, while when God had taken the *poverello* to Himself, miracles of healing and of grace were abundantly obtained through the merits and intercession of the saint.

The spring of the year 1225 found Pope Honorius III and the papal court at Rieti. Among the cardinals in attendance was Ugolino, now Bishop of Ostia, who, well aware of the precarious state of health into which Francis had fallen, lost no time in begging him immediately to come to Rieti, and consult the learned pontifical physicians. Somewhat unwillingly consenting to this, Francis, on his way thither, tarried to visit the Abbess of S. Damiano and her nuns.

Most biographers of St Clare explain this visit of St Francis as the expression of his natural desire for a last sojourn with his spiritual daughter and the nuns of his Second Order. Signor Loccatelli Paolucci, however, holds that this visit was arranged by Brother Elias, who hoped



## *Assisi of St Francis*

that careful nursing by the nuns might alleviate the sufferings of his superior. St Francis, since his return from Palestine in 1220, suffered, says Thomas of Celano, from an affection of the liver that long caused him much discomfort, and towards the end of his life so incapacitated him from retaining any nourishment that medical care and attention wholly failed to help his painful malady.

The Abbess of S. Damiano had prepared for the use of St Francis a little hut of wattles hard by the convent garden; here the two saints often spent an hour in happy converse, dwelling upon the love and goodness of God and His divine wisdom. Clare also—she was herself in bad health—must often have marvelled at the exemplary patience and the uncomplaining resignation which Francis displayed.

The little hut was much overrun at night by rats and mice which troubled the holy man as he lay on his hard bed; but he prayed that the plague might cease, and not only was his prayer heard but heavenly visions would often console him during the watches of the brief summer nights. In the daytime the nuns, as they passed to and fro by the door often heard him singing aloud the lauds and canticles so familiar to the everyday life of the Umbrian people; but on one occasion they heard a new song, an inspired hymn of blessing and triumph, welling up from the very heart of Francis. For one day as he and the Abbess were seated together at table, suddenly the saint was ravished in ecstasy, and lifting his hands and eyes to heaven he burst forth into a song of rapture. "Laudato sia lo Signore," he sang, and so continued unto the end of the wonderful hymn, "The Canticle of the Sun."

This hymn—first mentioned by Bartholomew of Pisa in his book of the "Conformities," 1380—was written down in the original Italian. The two oldest MSS. containing it,

## *The Death of St Francis*

preserved in the monasteries of La Verna and the Porziuncula,\* both commence: "Here begin the Praises of the Creatures which the Blessed Francis made to the praise and honour of God while he was ill in S. Damiano."

"This poem," remarks Monsieur Ozanam in his book, *Les Poètes Franciscains*, "is very brief, nevertheless the whole soul of Francis is poured out in it. . . . It conveys to us a breath from Umbria, that earthly Paradise where the heavens seem all of gold, and the earth all jewelled with flowers."

Francis remained all through August at S. Damiano but left in September to join the Cardinal Bishop of Ostia at Rieti. With grieving hearts Clare and the nuns saw him depart, knowing all too well that his health had not improved under their care, and that his life was now drawing to its close. Never again, indeed, were they to see his face in life. He remained at Rieti until winter set in, but, the papal physicians having failed to relieve his sufferings or to help his eyesight, he then left, intending to pass the winter among the mountain hermitages. In the spring of 1226 he journeyed to Siena in order to consult an eminent oculist of that city, but, on arriving there, was seized with violent hæmorrhage from the lungs. Dropsy now set in, and perceiving that his life was in danger, his alarmed companions sent in all haste for Brother Elias, who at once hurried to Siena, and by express desire of Francis made preparations for immediately transporting him to Assisi. Despite all care and precaution, this journey proved very tedious and trying to the sick man. Strange as it may appear to modern ideas, it was at that time considered an advantage for any city to possess the body or relics of a great saint. Fearing lest the Perugians, by feints or even by force, might endeavour to detain the dying Francis, Elias obtained from Assisi a body of men-at-arms as a guard for his little party, and

\* See Father Paschal Robinson, *Writings of St Francis*.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

made a long detour in order to avoid entering Perugia. The party reached home unmolested, but Francis was in the last stage of exhaustion, owing to the excruciating pain which had tormented him throughout the rough journey.

At Assisi Bishop Guido, his old friend, received Francis into that same episcopal palace within which he had, so many years before, renounced the world. Here he lay until the end of the summer of 1226, devotedly nursed by the four friars, Leo, Rufino, Masseo, and Angelo Tancredi, who had been his companions on Monte La Verna. Watching beside the couch of their beloved father, these devoted brothers knew that the end could not be long delayed; but the joyousness of the saint's disposition lifted them above all personal sorrow, as he bade them sing the familiar lauds, or the Canticle of "Brother Sun." In these he would often join. Upon being informed by his physician that his days were numbered, he added the following strophe to the Canticle: "Praised be my Lord for our sister, the bodily death, from the which no living man can flee. Woe to them who die in mortal sin. Blessed be those who shall find themselves in Thy most holy will, for the second death shall do them no ill."\*

The citizens of Assisi, rejoicing that their saint was safe among them, sorrowfully watched in spirit by his bedside while they carefully guarded the episcopal palace day and night. But even at such a time they must needs grieve his simple, loving heart by civic quarrels; for a dispute arose between the Chief Magistrate of the city and the Bishop, and the quarrel growing bitter, the Bishop excommunicated the Magistrate. The latter retaliated by calling upon all good citizens to desist from supplying the Bishop with food and other necessities of life. Hearing of this, Francis—so recounts *The Mirror of Perfection*—composed and added yet

\* Father Paschal Robinson's translation.

## *The Death of St Francis*

another verse to his "Canticle of the Sun" beginning: "Praised be Thou, O my Lord, of them that do show forgiveness for love of Thee." Sending a Brother to the wrathful Magistrate, he requested him to come to the Palace with his fellow-magistrates and other influential citizens, and when all were assembled in the outer court, Francis commanded two of the friars to chant his "Lauds" in their hearing. The citizens, as he had believed, listened to his message. For as they hearkened, their hearts were touched, and with streaming eyes the Magistrate craved forgiveness of the Bishop "for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His servant the blessed Francis." Not to be behindhand, the Bishop confessed himself "by nature swift to wrath," implored pardon of the Magistrate, and thus completed the reconciliation.

Early in the autumn Francis anxiously desired to be taken to the Porziuncula, that he might breathe his last near the "Holy Place of Blessed Mary." The Bishop, seeing that his sufferings increased, and that no remedies or nursing either alleviated them or improved his condition, acceded to this request. One evening, therefore, when the sun was declining in a blaze of glory, the brethren tenderly bore the holy father through the now-closed Portaccia and down the winding road to Sta Maria degli Angeli.

Arrived at the lazaretto of the "Crucified Brothers"—now Casa Gualdi—Francis bade his bearers halt and turn his face towards his beloved city. Supported by two friars, he then raised his hand and solemnly blessed his birthplace. "Lord," he prayed, "may she for ever be the place and habitation of them that do truly acknowledge Thee, and glorify Thy blessed and most glorious Name, from everlasting unto everlasting. Amen."\*

At his special desire Francis, on arrival at the Porziuncula, was borne into the church, and left for a brief space

\* *Speculum Perfectionis.*

## *Assisi of St Francis*

before the altar. From thence they conveyed him to the infirmary, a little cell still to be seen in the great basilica of Sta Maria degli Angeli. In this narrow chamber Francis passed away.

During the latter days of his life the founder's thoughts must have dwelt much upon the future of his Order. He solemnly charged the friars never to desert the Porziuncula: "Never, O my children, abandon this place. If ye are ever driven away upon the one side, return upon the other, for this is of a truth a most holy place in which God has placed His habitation."\*

Francis is believed to have made a testament while at the hermitage of the "Celle," near Cortona, during the previous winter. He had also written to the Abbess and nuns of S. Damiano a last wish couched in these words:

"I, little Brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of Jesus Christ our Most High Lord, and of His most holy Mother, and to persevere therein until the end. And I beseech you all, my ladies, and counsel you to live always in this most holy life of poverty. And watch yourselves well that ye in no wise depart from it through the teaching and advice of anyone."

St Francis also wrote another letter, to a certain great lady and most true friend in Rome, Giacoma di Settesoli, the wife, tradition says, of a member of the powerful Roman house of Frangipani. Giacoma—whom Francis affectionately calls "Frate Giacoma"—had been among the earliest disciples of the *poverello* in Rome—where he first knew her in the year 1212—and had since proved herself one of the greatest benefactresses to the Friars Minor. To her, from his death-bed, Francis wrote "to notify her of mine estate and especially . . . that she send me some religious cloth that is like unto ashes in colour; and with the cloth let her

\* Thomas of Celano, vi.



ASSISI FROM PERUGIA





## *The Death of St Francis*

send also of the marchpane that many a time she hath made for me in the city.”\* But this touching request had been forestalled, for to Giacoma as she prayed had come a mystical warning, to tarry not but hasten to the Blessed Francis. Thus, even as the brother deputed to carry the letter to Rome was preparing to set forth, a knocking was heard at the door. Giacoma with her sons and many pious friends stood without, come to bid farewell to the holy father. “Frate Giacoma” had brought with her all those things desired by Francis. The comfits he could but taste, for he was then sinking fast; and the shroud was used for his burial. This beautiful little story Brother Leo concludes thus: “In the week wherein the Lady Giacoma did come did our most holy father pass unto the Lord.”

On Saturday, October 3, 1226, towards nightfall, Francis, having received the last rites of the Church, said to the assembled brethren: “The hour is come; God calls me to Himself.” And he solemnly blessed them as they came and knelt beside his couch, crossing his arms and laying his hands upon their bowed heads, and for the last time breaking bread with them. One of the friars read aloud the holy Gospel appointed for Maundy Thursday—one peculiarly appropriate to this last scene—beginning, *Ante diem festum Paschæ*. “Now before the feast day of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”

The Gospel being ended, Francis desired the brethren to cover him with sackcloth sprinkled with ashes—the symbols of penitence—and himself joined them in their recitation of Psalm cxli: *Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi*. When the voice ceased, amid the deep silence that followed, peacefully and without struggle, the soul of Francis entered

\* *Speculum Perfectionis*.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

into the joy of his Lord. At the moment of his passing a flock of larks, those birds of the dawn, alighted with rapturous song upon the roof of the humble cell, as though saluting the eternal morn that had dawned upon the restored vision of "Christ's Poor Man."\* "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name; the just wait for me."

*Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.*

\* Thomas of Celano.

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Saint

O gioia! O ineffabile allegrezza!  
O vita intera d'amore e di pace!  
O senza brama sicura ricchezza!

*Paradiso*, xxvii, 7-9.

THE news of the death of Brother Francis spread rapidly over the countryside, and a great multitude from mountain and plain hurried to the death-chamber in the Porziuncula, there to gaze for the last time upon the peaceful countenance of the departed saint.

The night was spent around the bier in prayer, and in the morning the citizens of Assisi, accompanied by the clergy and notables, went down to Sta Maria degli Angeli that they might assist in transporting the venerated remains of their *poverello* to the Church of S. Giorgio.

And as they proceeded slowly up the winding road, men, women and children, all bearing olive branches and wax tapers, sang—their last act of homage offered to the Saint and teacher—no mournful dirges, but hymns of triumph and of joy.

The friars, remembering a promise made to Abbess Clare that she should see his face once more, directed the procession by way of S. Damiano. There two of the magistrates and two of the friars laid the bier before the grille through which the dead saint's spiritual daughters were wont to receive the Communion of the Body of the Lord; and first the Abbess, and following her the nuns, approached one by one to gaze for the last time upon the countenance of the holy founder. "Never again," exclaims Thomas of Celano, "shall they have speech of him who shall no more return to visit them, for his feet were now turned into

## *Assisi of St Francis*

another way. Wherefore, with sobs and groans, and with tears that would not be checked, gazing upon him, these gave voice unto their grief: 'O dearly beloved father, what shall become of us without thee? why hast thou abandoned us? Oh, why dost thou leave us so heavily laden with grief? With thee is departed all our consolation. We, who be dead to the world, lose in thee the sole support of our weakness.'" Sorrowfully, yet with holy gladness, they stooped to kiss those hands so wonderfully adorned with precious gems and lustrous pearls; and the bearers, raising once more their holy treasure, that grille was closed which not again shall reveal so great a grief.

As the funeral procession turned from S. Damiano towards the city gates, the community within the cloister listened to the sound of its chants growing ever fainter and fainter in the distance, while the *De Profundis* merged into hymns of triumph and thanksgiving.

The earthly remains of St Francis were laid with all reverence in the precincts of the Church of S. Giorgio; for "in that place," says St Bonaventura, "while yet a child, Francis had learnt the first beginning of letters; there he had begun to preach. Now, lastly, in that same spot, he found his first resting-place."

By the death of their founder the Friars Minor sustained irreparable loss. No Minister-General could be elected until the next General Chapter: it therefore fell to Brother Elias, being then Vicar-General, to act during the interim. His first measure was to dispatch to each of the Provincial Ministers a letter—a real cry of grief—announcing the death of St Francis, and conveying the holy patriarch's last benediction. But the reins of government were no sooner firmly in his hands than he began to carry out such plans as had lain dormant in his ambitious brain.

The life and character of Brother Elias form an interest-



ASSISI : THE REFECTORY OF THE CONVENT OF S. DAMIANO





## *The Saint*

ing psychological study, and although his motives are easily discernible, it is apparent that he possessed great capacities for good. Of humble origin, his youth was spent at his trade—that of mattress-making—and no student of his life can doubt that Bomberone, for so he was known in the world, made a grievous mistake when he adopted the habit of a Friar Minor. It is certain that Francis, with his keen insight into character and the complex motives which animated his fellow-men, was well aware of the peculiar temperament of Elias. The great administrative powers of the Vicar-General were not lost upon his Superior, who trusted him; but so soon as the restraining personal influence of the *poverello* was withdrawn, Brother Elias gave free rein to the promptings of arrogance, and his love of power and wealth. It was thus quite natural that a man of his character should at once desire to assert his position as Minister-General by promoting a scheme for the erection of a magnificent church, upon which all the beauties that art and money can command should be lavished—a shrine worthy to be the permanent resting-place of “poor Brother Francis”—the man who desired to rest, as he had lived, among the poor and the despised. In this matter, however, Brother Elias was not to have his way entirely undisputed. Many of the brethren gravely disapproved of his plans as absolutely divergent from the teaching and ideals of the founder.

Already, owing to the action of Brother Elias, two distinct parties were shaping themselves and causing divisions within the ranks of the Friars Minor—these were known later on as the “Zelanti” or adherents to the strict rule, and “relaxed” or followers of Elias—divisions against which Francis, foreseeing their probability no less than their ill-effects on the Order, had solemnly warned his disciples.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

The first Pentecostal Chapter—that of 1227—held after the death of St Francis, certainly did not lack decision, for it deposed Brother Elias in favour of Brother John Parenti of Florence, then Minister of the Spanish province, who was elected Minister-General. In no way however daunted or discouraged, the Ex-Vicar-General—a man of stronger will than the new head of the Friars Minor, and not easily to be controlled—continued to promote the building of the great basilica. In this he was encouraged and assisted by the Assisians, to whom the expressed wish of St Francis—that he might be buried on the “Colle Inferno,” the place of a common execution—appeared an unspeakable outrage.

In the month of March, 1228, one Simone di Piccio, a citizen of Assisi, came forward with the offer of a portion of land situated upon the slope of that same “Colle Inferno,” and this example was shortly followed by another citizen, Monaldo di Lionardo, who offered a piece of wooded land adjoining that given by Simone. Both of these gifts were accepted by Elias, and the first steps were thus taken, when, on March 18, 1227, Pope Honorius III died and was succeeded by Cardinal Ugolino under the title of Gregory IX.

The political horizon was seriously darkened at this period by the continual strife between the Papacy and the Emperor Frederic II. At Easter in this year grave riots, fomented by the partisans of the Emperor, compelled the aged Gregory to leave Rome and seek a retreat among the loyal inhabitants of his province of Umbria. The Pope, therefore, retired to Assisi, where he remained through the months of June and July, and this choice is believed to have been prompted by a desire to seek from time to time the company and conversation of the Abbess of S. Damiano. Be this as it may, one of the Pope's first acts on reaching Assisi was to consecrate the High Altar of the Cathedral of S. Rufino,

## *The Saint*

a building which had recently developed in importance and beauty, thanks to the assiduous care of the townsfolk. Gregory also warmly approved the scheme of Brother Elias; indeed, in the previous month of April, he had confirmed his approbation of it by a Papal Bull sanctioning the erection of a church worthy to receive the sacred remains of the blessed patriarch, and encouraging the faithful in all parts of the world to subscribe towards the work.

That the building of the basilica could thus be encouraged, and pushed forward in the teeth of the opposition offered by the Minister-General and the early companions of St Francis is clear proof of the ever-increasing power of Elias, and of the growing laxity in discipline and ideals which his influence was gradually bringing about among the friars. The hearts of the first companions were sore with grief as they watched these proceedings. Remonstrances were useless; the "Colle Inferno" was renamed by the Pope "Colle Paradiso," and Brother Elias himself superintended the work, placing a porphyry vase for the receipt of offerings in the vicinity of the building.

Against this act the soul of Brother Leo finally revolted. He hastened to take counsel with Brother Giles, but after he had described the deplorable proceedings on the "Hill of Paradise," Giles wisely advised him "if he were a dead man to overthrow the vase, but being a living man to leave the matter alone, as the hand of Elias was heavy." Leo, however, would in no way be contented with such advice. Accompanied by several friends, ardent friars, true lovers of St Francis and of "Lady Poverty," he broke the fine vase to atoms; whereupon Elias, furious, caused Leo to be beaten by his servants, and expelled from Assisi. Neither Pope nor Minister-General appears to have interfered in defence of Brother Leo, the constant companion of the saint whose memory they professed to honour, and in protest

## *Assisi of St Francis*

against the conduct of Elias and his party Leo is believed to have retired to the Porziuncula, there to write those portions of *The Mirror of Perfection* attributed to his pen.

Meanwhile, Pope Gregory, approving the universally expressed desire of the Assisans for the canonization of Francis, had commanded the preliminaries to be taken in his cause; and as soon as they were completed, some two years after the *poverello's* death, he raised St Francis to the altars of the Church.

News of these events doubtless reached Abbess Clare through her old friends Giles, Rufino, Leo, and Juniper, with whom, in the inmost fibres of her love and devotion to the memory of their common master, she certainly suffered. From time to time, nevertheless, she received the venerable Pope, then eighty-five years of age, in the cool cloister of S. Damiano, where, as he himself expressed it, "he found much consolation in her conversation and devout entertainment." A legend, told in the *Fioretti*, concerns one of these visits to the "Poor Ladies":

"Among other times the Holy Father came on a time to her convent to hear her speak of things celestial and divine; and as they thus discoursed together on diverse matters, St Clare in the meantime let make ready the tables, and set the bread thereon, that the Holy Father might bless it. So when their spiritual discourse was ended, St Clare, kneeling down with great reverence, besought him that he would be pleased to bless the bread set on the table. Replied the Holy Father: 'Sister Clare, most faithful, I desire that thou bless this bread and make thereon the sign of the most holy Cross of Christ, to whom thou hast wholly given thyself.' Quoth St Clare: 'Most Holy Father, pardon me, seeing that I should be deserving of much blame, if I, that am a poor, vile woman, should take on me to give this blessing before the Vicar of Christ.' And the Pope replied: 'To the end

## *The Saint*

that this may not be imputed to presumption but to the merit of obedience, I command thee by holy obedience that thou make the sign of the most holy Cross on this bread, and bless it in the name of God.' Then St Clare, like a true daughter of obedience, most devoutly blessed those loaves with the sign of the most holy Cross. O marvel! incontinent on all those loaves appeared the sign of the Cross impressed most fair to see: then of those loaves, part were eaten, and part for the miracle's sake were put aside. And the Holy Father, when he beheld the miracle, took of the said bread and giving thanks to God, departed, leaving St Clare his blessing."\*

At the end of July Pope Gregory IX quitted Assisi and retired to Perugia, from whence he addressed an autograph letter commencing: "To his beloved daughter in Jesus Christ, Clare, Abbess, and all other religious in the Cloister of S. Damiano of Assisi, Gregory sends greeting and peace." Proceeding, he recommends himself to the prayers of the Abbess and the community, "that God may have pity upon him in the midst of the snares and difficulties which surround the papal throne," he continues with words of encouragement to "his daughter of predilection" "to endure patiently to the end in prayer and meditation," desires constant news of her, and declaring that "her sympathy supports him in his sorrows," concludes by invoking the grace of God upon her and upon all the nuns.

The following year, 1228, Pope Gregory returned to Assisi for the canonization of St Francis. The ceremonies took place on July 16 in the Church of S. Giorgio, which was decorated and brilliantly illuminated with hundreds of wax tapers, and

\* *The Little Flowers of St Francis*, translated by T. W. Arnold, revised edition, 1908. In an inventory of relics preserved and venerated in the Church of S. Damiano, compiled under date 1630 by one Brother Domenic della Bastia, and preserved among the convent archives, there appears "A loaf blessed by St Clare." This relic also appears in a later inventory published in Perugia in 1717 by Father Anthony of Orvieto.



## *Assisi of St Francis*

filled to its utmost limits by an enthusiastic crowd. This gathering in the church, in which the body of "Brother Francis" still rested, must have presented an unrivalled spectacle, for to this multitude the humble friar, who was about to receive the highest honour that the Church on earth can bestow, had been no stranger, but the beloved friend and benefactor, whose voice had bidden them return to the paths of righteousness and peace. Among the crowd knelt many of his spiritual sons and daughters, members of his own family perhaps, and numerous friends, first among whom was the venerable Pope, who was himself about to declare his praises, also with Cardinal Reynerio, Bishop Guido, his early guide, devoted "brother, Giacoma di Settesoli" and her sons. Gregory pronounced the panegyric of the saint, choosing as his text the following passage from Holy Scripture: "He shone in his days as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full; and as the sun when it shineth, so did he shine in the temple of God."\*

A deep impression was produced upon his hearers by the Holy Father's discourse, and the enthusiasm increased when, ascending the throne, Gregory solemnly announced with outstretched arms that the name of the blessed Father Francis was henceforth inscribed upon the roll of the saints. Immediately afterwards he intoned the *Te Deum* which was taken up by the clergy and friars, while the people responded in an outburst of triumphant joy. Holy Mass followed, and at its conclusion the Friars Minor, each holding in his hand a lighted taper or branch of olive, stood around the high altar, chanting in unison: "*Franciscus, pauper et humilis, cælum dives ingreditur: hymnis cælestibus honoratur. Alleluia.*"

\* Ecclus 1, 6, 7.



THE EASTWARD VIEW FROM ASSISI



## CHAPTER XVIII

# The Foundation of the Basilica

Ista . . . surrexit festinanter petens sibi claustrum ostendi. Et adducentes eam in quodam colle ostenderunt ei totum orbem quem respicere poterat, dicentes: "Hoc est claustrum nostrum Domina."—*Sacrum Commercium*, xxii.

ON the day following the canonization of St Francis Pope Gregory laid the foundation stone of the great basilica, and granted a special indulgence to all who by offerings or by personal labour should aid in the construction of the new church. Money and gifts speedily poured in from every side, not only from the neighbouring towns and districts, but from all European countries and even from Christians in the far East, while kings and princes vied with one another in making offerings of value. The Emperor Frederic II, Baldwin, the Greek Emperor, John, King of Jerusalem, and Wenceslas, King of Bohemia, were among the sovereigns who sent large donations. Everything being thus favourable, the building of the lower church, of the friary, and of the papal palace was completed by the beginning of 1230. On May 16 of that year, the General Chapter, assembled for the first time in the new friary received the papal brief granting authority for the translation to the new church of the body of their holy founder, and the friars appointed May 25 for the important ceremony. The news that this long-looked-for event was about to take place was carried far and wide, and Ceprano—the old Assisan chronicler, who has left an account of the translation—declares that a greater crowd assembled than could be contained within the city walls.

Now Brother Elias, ever haunted by fear lest the Perugians should attempt to rob Assisi of its most precious possession,

## *Assisi of St Francis*

had, with the help of certain citizens, contrived a plan by which he hoped to effect the conveyance of the sacred remains to a secret vault in the lower church, in which it was believed that the coffin might remain undiscovered and unmolested. To ensure the success of this project he arranged with the Podestà that all male inhabitants should be summoned to bear arms on the occasion of the translation, and that the city militia should be called out to guard the bier. Therefore, at the appointed hour, surrounded by the militia, the friars in procession left the Church of S. Giorgio bearing the bier covered with a rich pall offered by Queen Blanche, mother of St Louis, King of France.

A vast number of clergy followed, carrying torches, while close in their rear pressed an enormous crowd of people. Suddenly, at a given signal, the soldiers about the bier closed in upon the bearers and seized their precious burden. Indescribable tumult ensued, but the citizens of Assisi, drawing their weapons, prevented any interference on the part of the crowd. In the midst of the confusion, the soldiers rapidly conveyed the body of the saint into the basilica, the doors of which were quickly closed and barred behind them.

The wrath of the ministers and friars at these proceedings was intense; they at once appealed to the Pope against Elias and the municipality. The Pope, equally indignant at the outrage offered to the body of St Francis, threatened Assisi with an interdict unless within fifteen days he received full and satisfactory explanation and expressions of regret. The alarmed magistrates hastily dispatched ambassadors to Rome, and their explanation of the fears which had dictated the action of Brother Elias and the citizens seeming reasonable to the Pope, he granted the pontifical pardon. The interrupted work on the basilica was therefore resumed, and the building of the upper church commenced. The General

## *The Foundation of the Basilica*

Chapter re-assembled three days after the translation of the body of their founder, when the partisans of Brother Elias conspired to force his election as Minister-General, and an interesting account of this incident is given in the Chronicle of Thomas of Eccleston, an English friar. "At the Chapter during which occurred the translation of the body of St Francis the partisans of Brother Elias determined that all whom he had permitted to come should take part in the General Chapter, for he had permitted to come to the Chapter all who would elect him in opposition to the wills of the Ministers Provincial. Wherefore, taking Brother Elias in their arms, they carried him from his cell to the door of the Chapter-room, and breaking down the door, would have put him into the place of the Minister-General, which, when he saw, Brother John stripped himself of his habit before the whole Chapter. At length being put to shame, the disturbers ceased their disturbance, but would give ear neither to St Anthony nor to any other Minister Provincial. The people outside, hearing the disturbance, believed it to have arisen because the body of St Francis had been translated three days before the Chapter met. But five novices, who had been soldiers and were present at the Chapter, wept when they saw what was taking place. They said, nevertheless, that the disturbance would bring good to the Order, since no order could tolerate such disorderly members."

But strong as Elias believed himself to be, the victory rested with John Parenti and the Ministers Provincial, who promptly sent him away with his turbulent followers to do penance in various provinces. Thus writes Thomas of Eccleston: "Brother Elias went and dwelt in a small hermitage, and let his hair and beard grow; and by this simulation of holiness he regained the good will of the Order and of the Brethren."



## *Assisi of St Francis*

It will be remembered that the celebrated Portuguese friar known later as St Anthony of Padua was present at the "Chapter of Mats." At the conclusion of that Chapter, he lingered on in Assisi, friendless and undecided as to the future. Fortunately he attracted the attention of an influential friar, Gratian, Provincial of Romagna. Brother Gratian interested himself in the young man, encouraged his visits, and on further acquaintance offered him a retreat in the hermitage of Montepaolo, ten miles from Forli. In process of time, brother Anthony became the first Franciscan Doctor of Theology, residing for some time in Bologna. Returning from that city to Assisi in the summer of 1227, he attended the first Chapter held after the death of St Francis—it appointed him Minister Provincial of Romagna—and was present at the translation of the body of the saint. Whether he took any active part against Brother Elias is not recorded, but it is known that Anthony was one of the friars sent to Rome to lay before the Pope the complaints of the Ministers against Elias, who, by introducing his partisans into the Chapter General, had violated the rule restricting to the Ministers Provincial and the Custodes the right of electing the Minister General, and was also causing grave scandal in the Order by advocating the relaxation of the strict observance of poverty.

Notwithstanding these complaints, the adherents of Elias continued to increase, and the chapter of Rieti in 1233 deposed John Parenti—"the austere man of wisdom and piety"—in his favour. The appointment of Elias was permitted by the Pope, says Thomas of Eccleston, "chiefly because of his intimacy with St Francis." The new Minister General proved a veritable tyrant to the Order. Greedy of wealth, unscrupulous and cruel, it was not long before the first companions of St Francis avoided all dealings with him. He eventually moved his head-quarters to the neighbouring



ASSISI : THE MONASTERY OF S. FRANCESCO



## *The Foundation of the Basilica*

city of Cortona, where he was popular, from whence he continued to superintend and vigorously to hasten the completion and embellishment of the basilica of St Francis. For this purpose he invited Giunta Pisano to Assisi, probably about the year 1236, to adorn the Shrine, and to paint a "Crucifixion," in which he should be represented on his knees reciting the *Miserere*. This painting is lost, but in his recent work on the basilica of S. Francesco, Signor Adolfo Venturi notices that three copies of the painting still exist, two at Pisa and one in Sta Maria degli Angeli.

In the year 1239 Brother Elias was finally deposed, and thenceforward his history has little connexion with the city of Assisi. Twice excommunicated for rebellion, he finally entered the service of Frederick II, whom he served until the Emperor's death in 1250. Elias then returned to Cortona, where he died at an advanced age, penitent and reconciled to the Church. He was buried in the grey habit of St Francis.

To Brother Elias succeeded Brother Albert of Pisa, Minister Provincial of England, who must undoubtedly have disapproved of the beautiful new friary constructed by his predecessor, for it is recorded of him that when in England, he had demolished a friary that he considered too luxurious. The "Zelanti" were triumphant at this election, for they now looked forward to see the Order purged of its heresies, and once more returning to the observance of the holy patriarch's Rule. To this the first companions were ever faithful; and it is recorded of Brother Giles that he rebuked the brethren, and some say the Pope himself, for permitting the Rule of poverty so greatly to be relaxed.\*

Brother Giles, says the legend, was invited to accompany Gregory IX during an inspection of the new friary at

\* See *Il Beato Egidio d' Assisi*, monografia di Monsignore Antonio Briganti.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Assisi, but while the Pontiff and his attendants, lost in admiration of all that they saw, freely expressed their pleasure and satisfaction, Giles remained dumb. Turning to him, the Pope said: "Thou remainest silent and sayest naught; what thinkest thou?" Giles replied: "Holy Father, so well lodged are my brothers that nothing more remains for them to lack save wives." Much annoyed and disconcerted at this unexpected reply, the Pope reproved the hardy friar; but Giles quoted the teaching of the Rule: "Let all the brothers strive to follow in the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let them remember that we ought to have nothing else in the whole world, except as the Apostle says, 'Having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content.'"

Brother Albert of Pisa died in the year 1240. His immediate successors, Brothers Haymo of Faversham—an Englishman—Crescentius and John of Parma, did not favour the great basilica, which therefore remained unfinished until Pope Innocent IV brought it to completion.

The first architect of the basilica of S. Francesco of whom anything certain is known was Brother John of Penna, who retired to the Province of Ancona, of which he was Minister-General, when he had completed the Chapel of St Francis. He was then an old man, and Innocent IV "who was extremely anxious to see the building of the basilica terminated," summoned Brother Philip of Campello to take his place, giving him authority to receive donations, "to adorn with noblest architecture the mother church of the Order, and to decorate it with the beauty proper to it." On the feast of St Francis, Oct. 4, 1253, this Pontiff visited Assisi to consecrate such portions of the building as were completed. The papal court lodged in the new palace adjoining the friary, and Pope Innocent enriched the basilica with an indulgence, to be gained by the faithful who should visit it on the feast

## *The Foundation of the Basilica*

day and the fifteen days following. Nevertheless, the scruples of the "Zelanti" continued, and the Pope, to remove these, addressed to Brother Philip a letter, recommending and encouraging the good work raised to the glory of God and of his saint, by which their objections were gradually overcome.

The Upper Church was probably completed about 1257, the year of St Bonaventura's election as Minister-General. From that time forth treasures of Italian art have been bestowed upon it, with almost unexampled lavishness. The great artists who endowed the church with precious gifts of sculpture and painting, of fine mosaic and marble inlay, gave of their best to adorn this shrine raised to the glory of God and of Christ's *poverello*, and, exclaims a modern scholar, "The basilica seems to chant through the generations a song of everlasting love and compassion, blessing from the hill of Paradise, the Umbrian mountains and valleys that evermore re-echo the 'Canticle of the Sun' of Brother Francis."\*

\* A. Venturi, *La Basilica di Assisi*.



## CHAPTER XIX

# The Princess of the Poor

Per la natura lieta onde deriva  
la virtù mista per lo corpo luce,  
come letizia per pupilla viva.

*Paradiso*, ii, 142-144.

THE Abbess of S. Damiano must have watched all these events with deepest interest not unmixed with anxiety, rejoicing with Brother Leo and the "Zelanti" at the election of Albert of Pisa, and the return of the friars to the primitive observance. The virtues and austerities practised by St Clare increased with years, and her fame spread far beyond the confines of Italy. Houses of her Order were established all over Europe; she was in close correspondence with many spiritual daughters in foreign lands with whom she never conversed in life, and a number of letters written to them with her own hand are preserved in the archives of the convent of Sta Chiara.

Among noble and illustrious names borne by these "Poor Ladies" two may be mentioned especially, the German Princess Agnes and the French Princess Isabella. Agnes was daughter of Stanislas Ottocar, King of Bohemia and his wife Constance of Hungary, and St Clare in her letters alludes to her affectionately as "the other half of my soul." This princess, beatified after death, founded and built a convent at Prague in the year 1236. Princess Isabella was sister to St Louis, King of France. She founded a convent in Paris, and was among the earliest to take the habit of St Clare, and became first Abbess of the French *Clarisses*.

The rapidity with which houses of "Poor Ladies" arose in Italy has already been mentioned. The first were S.

## *The Princess of the Poor*

Severino at Colpersito, founded by St Francis; Monticelli near Florence, to which St Francis sent St Agnes from Assisi, and Vallegloria at Spello. Broken in health, suffering from constant illness, and towards the end of her life quite infirm, the Abbess of S. Damiano directed the development of these numerous branches of the tree which she herself had planted. The nuns, watching with loving anxiety by her sick bed, constantly endeavoured to induce her to modify her occupations and austerities, austerities which she would not allow them to imitate. Her love of poverty, eulogized by another great saint, Theresa of Avila, was as deep as that of St Francis himself for "his chosen Bride," and like her care for poor churches this may be considered her heritage from her spiritual father. During long days of sickness, Clare lay upon her poor bed, spinning flax from which to fashion corporals, purificators, and other linen required for the service of the altar, while at other times offerings of fine pieces of silk or embroidery, brought to the holy Abbess by the ladies of Assisi, were fashioned by her into palls and burses. St Clare's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and to the infancy and Passion of our Lord, is well known, and charmingly pictured by an old Chronicler in the following legend, which tells of the ecstasy of mind into which the Abbess once fell when meditating upon the death of Christ.

During three days and three nights, says this Chronicler, she remained in her cell rapt to the seventh heaven; one of her companions, remarking her absence from choir, sought her to inquire if she were ill, but seeing the Abbess all absorbed in prayer, she left her undisturbed. On the third night following, fearing that the holy mother, who had given no sign of life, must have expired, the nun returned; and seeing she yet lived, she reminded her with loud voice how St Francis ever commanded her, by holy obedience,

## *Assisi of St Francis*

that she should eat sufficient to sustain the health of her body. Clare heard her voice, and perceiving that the nun carried a candle in her hand, remarked, "What wilt thou with a candle, is it not yet morning?" The nun replied: "Nay, Mother dear, for the first night is already passed, and we have lived yet two more days, and now are we at the evening of Saturday." Hearing this the Abbess exclaimed, "Blessed be the long sleep that so greatly I required; behold the Lord has listened with favour to my prayers." And straightway she enjoined the nun that she should in no wise make mention of this ecstasy until after her (St Clare's) death.

In the year 1244 Frederic II returned from his bloodless conquest of Jerusalem. Owing to fresh dissensions with the Pope, he invaded the papal dominions and directed his anger especially against the Guelph cities of Umbria, which had rebelled against the authority of his ally Duke Rinaldo. Commanded by Vitale d' Anversa, one of the most famous of Ghibelline captains, his army entered Umbria and summoned Perugia and Assisi to immediate surrender. The Assisans refusing his demand, Vitale laid siege to the city, plundering the surrounding districts and committing every kind of atrocity. Among the Imperial troops employed were many so-called Saracens\*—descendants of those Saracens who at one time dominated Sicily and Calabria. Ordered by Vitale to fire the churches and dwellings outside the walls of Assisi, these troops assaulted the Convent of S. Damiano, but, as the legend already mentioned narrates, were completely routed through the prayers of the Abbess. St Clare was ill in bed at the time of the assault, and the terrified nuns sought refuge at her side, weeping and wringing their hands. With supreme confidence in her heavenly Father, the Abbess

\* These "Saracens" inhabited certain cities in the Terra di Lavoro, still designated as Lucerio and Nocera dei Mori or dei Pagani, bestowed upon them by Frederic II.



ASSISI: ORATORIO DELLE STIMATE



## *The Princess of the Poor*

bade them take courage, and calling on two young sisters—Frances of Colledimezzo and Illuminata of Pisa—to assist her to rise, she desired them to carry her into that oratory in which she was permitted to keep the Blessed Sacrament. Kneeling before her Lord with abundant tears, Clare besought Him to rescue His handmaidens from the ferocious enemy. And the Lord graciously answered her petition, for, unaccountable panic seizing the soldiers of Frederic, they abandoned the attack and fled, nor were they again seen in that place. Even as the prayers of Clare saved her convent, so, recounts the same Chronicle, did they once more cause the defeat of the army of the Emperor and the deliverance of her birthplace.

Furious at the defeat of his “Saracens” at S. Damiano, Vitale sent one of his lieutenants, Messer Prospero Consacchi di Amelia, with a letter to one Messer Ascanio Maccarrelli of Assisi, threatening that unless a large sum of money should forthwith be paid as ransom, he would raze the city to the ground and for ever bury it beneath a heap of stones and ashes. Hearing of the peril thus menacing Assisi, the Abbess of S. Damiano called her nuns about her and invited them to join with her in prayer and supplication for the deliverance of the city, “to which we should show great gratitude, seeing it doth nourish us with alms”; she also removed her veil in sign of mourning, and sprinkled her head with ashes. Then in that night arose a fearful tempest, which destroyed the camp of Vitale d’Anversa, and struck such terror into the hearts of his troops that, refusing again to attack the city, they fled precipitately. In memory of this miraculous deliverance, the magistrates, clergy, confraternities, and citizens of Assisi were wont to proceed in solemn procession on June 22, to the Church of S. Damiano, there to assist at a Mass of thanksgiving for the deliverance of the city.



## *Assisi of St Francis*

Forty-three years after assuming the holy habit of religion Clare fell into her long and last illness. Many friends visited her during this sickness, notably the Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, Protector of her Order, nephew of Pope Gregory IX, who afterwards became Pope himself under the title of Alexander IV. To the great consolation of the dying Abbess, this Prince of the Church arrived at the convent on September 8, 1252, and with his own hands administered the last rites of the Church to his old and revered friend. At her earnest request also, he promised to exert his influence to obtain from the Holy Father official confirmation of her Rule of "strictest poverty." In this he succeeded, and before her eyes closed for ever upon the light of this world, Clare was permitted the supreme joy of receiving the papal bull which established her dearest wish.

These events occurred in the winter of 1253. The following spring Sister Agnes arrived at S. Damiano from Florence, and was suffered to remain with her sister until the end. Almost at the same time Pope Innocent IV took refuge in Assisi from Perugia, which city was much disturbed by party factions; and he remained in Assisi five months. He also stood at the bedside of the dying Abbess, giving her, at her earnest desire, plenary absolution for all her sins. "Would to God, sister," cried the Holy Father, as with tears in his eyes he complied with her humble petition, "that my soul had the small need that thine has for this last absolution."

But perhaps the greatest consolation of all to Clare in her last moments was the frequent visits which she received from those early companions of St Francis, who had loved him even as she had loved him. Angelo Tancredi and Leo, and perhaps Giles, were often with her. Juniper also came to bid his last farewell, and Clare, receiving with a smile him whom she was wont to call *giocoliere di Dio*,\* called out :

\* Literally, a plaything or toy.



## *The Princess of the Poor*

“Brother Juniper, hast thou not some good news to tell me of our God?” On August 12, 1253, the great Abbess passed from this life. Shortly before the end she appeared to be in conversation with some one unseen, and one of the nuns, Anastasia, bending over her, inquired with whom she spake. Clare answered: “Dear sister, I am discoursing with this happy soul of mine.” At the moment of her passing, her weeping daughters declared that the death-chamber was filled with a heavenly company of white-robed virgins, wearing on their heads crowns of gold. Thereafter came one, beautiful above them all, shining with ineffable light, in whom the awe-struck nuns recognised the Mother of God, come to lead unto eternal life the poor servant of her divine Son, the “Princess of the Poor,” and “Duchess of the Humble.” St Clare was buried in the Church of S. Giorgio.

Brother Bernard of Quintavalle was among the first of the early companions of St Francis to follow him to eternal rest. Angelo Tancredi died five years after St Clare, and Blessed Giles in 1262. Giles, at the time of his death, was living at the hermitage of Monte Ripido, near Perugia. Feeling his end near, with the humility of a true follower of Christ and of St Francis, he sent a message to the Perugians forbidding the church bells to be rung, “neither for any miracle by me performed, nor to elevate me to the altars of the church . . . I desire no honour, save that bestowed upon the prophet Jonas.”\* Giles died after fifty-two years of religious life, aged eighty years, and was beatified by Pope Pius VI in the year 1777.

Leo and Rufino clung much together in their last years, and ended their days side by side at the beloved Porziuncula in the year 1271. Legend tells that both were awaiting and desiring the summons to depart, when, on the same

\* “And the Lord God prepared an ivy, and it came up over the head of Jonas, to be a shadow over his head, and to cover him (for he was fatigued), and Jonas was exceeding glad of the ivy.”—Prophecy of Jonas, iv, 6.

### *Assisi of St Francis*

night, Brother Bernard of Quintavalle appeared to each of the venerable friars, and they knew by this sign that the end of their pilgrimage was at hand. Leo hoped to go first, but Rufino had beheld Bernard with his waking eyes, whereas Leo had beheld him in his sleep, and so Rufino passed away before Leo. The bodies of Rufino, his "saint," and Leo, "God's poor sheep," were laid in the Church of St Francis to rest in death beside the father whom their faithful souls had loved so well in life.



ASSISI: PALAZZO COMUNALE.



## CHAPTER XX

# Guelph and Ghibelline Factions

The world was now full of hardy men, painful, and well practised in war. They were stubborn, and not to be subdued, but with infinite labour and danger.—St Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by John Healey.

THE office of Consul was abolished in Assisi in 1225, “A Captain of the People” and a “Podestà” replacing the Consuls, and each of these officers presided over a council—of which one dealt with general business and the other with special affairs. In the year 1275, when Messer Cipriano de Tornaquinci of Florence and Messer Guglielmo dei Molari were appointed to these offices, the Councils determined to complete the construction of the great tower forming part of the palace of the “Captain of the People”—now the Palazzo Comunale—and also to level, widen, and construct a wall around the piazza in front of the basilica of S. Francesco. To this end two houses, the property of one Paul of Spello, were demolished, and it was ordained that no further houses should be erected around the church to damage the approach and cause annoyance to the friars.

In the later years of the thirteenth century the great Captain Guido da Montefeltro, Count of Urbino, assumed the habit of St Francis, and sought peace in the Friary of S. Francesco. This Count Guido, a famous Ghibelline leader, had fought often, and captured many cities for the Emperor. Twice in his long career had he been reconciled to the Church, before, weary of bloodshed, he finally renounced the world and girded on the cord of the *poverello*. It is alleged that Pope Boniface VIII, during his long feuds with the Colonna family, sent messengers to Count Guido in his cell, in order to consult him as to certain military operations. The advice carried back to the Pontiff is said to have been treacherous, as may be read in Dante.\* However, the story is rejected by the Franciscan Order and the apologists of the

\* *Inferno*, canto xxvii.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Gaetani Pope. But whatever the misdeeds of Count Guido, he died a saintly death at Assisi in 1298, and his body, first interred in the basilica, was afterwards transferred by his son Frederic to the little church of S. Bernardino outside the city of Urbino.

The power of Perugia reached its zenith at the beginning of the thirteenth century, when this city dominated the whole of Umbria: unfortunately for the Assisians its development did not induce good relations between the two cities. In 1291 their constant disputes culminated, owing to the intervention of Perugia in a quarrel as to the boundaries between Assisi and the little town of Cannara. The Assisians, who had besieged that city, were routed by the Perugians, and, fearing a worse fate, they surrendered and consented to acknowledge the supremacy of their rivals.

Meanwhile, the rivalry between the Guelph and Ghibelline parties in Assisi, which may be dated from this period, brought the usual consequences; for the exiles, intriguing with "condottieri" leaders, perpetually betrayed the city to one or the other party.

Civic progress naturally ceased, and the short respites due to the recurrent "Truce of God"\* were never of sufficient duration to bring about any definite reforms or improvement.

Until the fourteenth century Assisi remained faithful to the Holy See, but in 1319 the exiled Ghibelline citizens, among whom were members of the prominent Fiumi and Macarelli families, bribed the mercenary captain, Muzio di Francesco, with the promise of the lordship of Assisi, to seize the city. Muzio's attempt succeeded, doubtless with the assistance of partisans within the walls; the Guelphs were exiled; and during the next two years the Imperialist power increased, the Ghibelline faction becoming paramount in the Valley of Spoleto. The Guelphs, however, never relaxing their en-

\*The "Truce of God" was a compact entered into by the barons and notables of districts to refrain from private warfare from Wednesday evenings until Monday mornings, also during the seasons of Advent and Lent, and during certain feasts. It protected women, priests, pilgrims, travellers, farm implements, and live stock, was blessed by the Church, and its violators heavily punished. "The Truce of God" had its origin in the South of France in the eleventh century, and lasted until the close of the thirteenth century.



## *Guelph and Ghibelline Factions*

deavours, at length persuaded the Perugians to besiege Assisi. In this extremity, Muzio and Ser Vergada Poppi, the Podestà, finding their coffers empty, forced open the sacristy of S. Francesco, and sold a portion of its gold and precious objects to the Commune of Arezzo for 1,400 gold florins; another portion obtaining a yet higher price from the city of Florence. Thus supplied, Muzio defended the city with such valour and skill that the Perugians were compelled to send for reinforcements of both horse and foot. In the following April, however, Pope John XVII placed Assisi under an interdict until the stolen treasure should be restored to S. Francesco, while the Guelphs offered 2,000 florins for the person of Muzio, and the mercenary captain, becoming alarmed, fled the city by night, the garrison lost courage, and the Council General surrendered. The peace which followed naturally involved the subjection of Assisi to Perugia, but the citizens as naturally awaited only a fresh opportunity to free themselves from the hated yoke. The opportunity for this came in the year 1367, when the great papal legate, Cardinal Egidio Albornoz lay at Foligno with the pontifical army. About the time of his arrival in that city Perugia sustained a heavy defeat at the hands of the "English Company," a body of mercenaries so called after their English captain, the adventurer, Sir John Hawkwood—known in Italy as "Giovanni Aguto." Profiting by the temporary check to the Perugian arms, Assisi made submission to the Holy See, and invited the legate to enter the city.

Cardinal Albornoz made his entry on April 5, 1367, and under his kindly rule the city for a time enjoyed tranquillity and peace. The conduct of the papal legate towards the citizens was marked by generosity and a sincere desire for the welfare of the people, and his measures meeting with the approval and support of Pope Urban V, Albornoz confirmed and restored to the city all its ancient privileges and rights, dismissed the Perugian officials, and gave his consent to the refortification of the town and the reconstruction of the Rocca Maggiore, the ruins of which had remained untouched since the days of Duke Conrad of Lutzen. Cardinal Albornoz also caused important additions to be made to the Friary



## *Assisi of St Francis*

of S. Francesco, upon the outer walls of which is still to be seen a shield charged with the arms of his family. He also founded the chapel of St Catherine in the Lower Church. The portrait in this chapel, representing the Cardinal kneeling at the feet of St Clement—the title of his Cardinalate—was probably painted by Stefano Fiorentino.

In the year following the submission of Assisi to the Holy See an abominable crime was committed—the murder of Blasco, Duke of Spoleto, a nephew of Cardinal Alborno, and deputy-governor of the Papal States, and of his son Garzia. The legate had probably left Assisi before the murder, the exact scene of which is disputed, some holding that it was close to the ancient Porta Sementone, now closed and known as the Portaccia, others, among them an ancient chronicler of Spello, placing it in the neighbouring castle of Piediluca. When, records the afore-mentioned writer, the legate received news of the murders, he immediately dispatched soldiers under a certain Conte Ugolino to punish the malefactors. Conte Ugolino burned and sacked the castle of Piediluca, hanging all the male inhabitants, and turning the women and children abroad clad only in their shifts. Duchess Sancia, the widow of Blasco, caused the bodies of her husband and her son to be taken to Assisi, where they were buried in the basilica in the chapel of St Anthony the Abbot; she gave the friars 132 florins for the funeral expenses, and 100 florins for perpetual Masses to be said for the repose of their souls. Three months after his departure from Assisi Cardinal Alborno died at Viterbo. By his own request, his remains were transferred from that city and laid to rest in the crypt beneath the chapel of St Catherine which he had founded in the basilica of S. Francesco.

Pacified by the wise and prudent measures of the late legate, the Assisians now looked forward to a brighter future. But little more than a year after the entry of Alborno, disorders again arose, owing to the tyrannous and rapacious conduct of the papal officials, who levied heavy and unjust taxes, and treated the citizens with harshness and cruelty, until the infuriated people revolted and drove them from their walls. For many years following these events the records of Assisi

## *Guelph and Ghibelline Factions*

offer little more than a wearisome and monotonous repetition of quarrels between the dominant factions, locally known as *di sotto* and *di sopra*. The *di sotto* were the Guelphs, who occupied the lower parishes, or *rione*, and held the lower gates, while the *di sopra*, or Ghibellines, controlled the upper town. The lordship of the city was tossed like a shuttlecock from one party to the other, "and the people," remarks Cristofani, "were always ready to proclaim the strongest tyrant Captain and Gonfaloniere of the city, and to follow him with every demonstration of rejoicing." Thus they welcomed with enthusiasm Biordo Michelotti, tyrant of Perugia, whom the Guidalotti family afterwards murdered as he conversed one evening with Guido Nepis in his own house, and, last of many such tyrants, Broglia di Trino, the condottiere who speedily deserted the city to fight the Pope's battles against the Colonna family. This Broglia obtained the power in 1399, and appears to have secured some small measure of tranquillity by appointing sixty-seven citizens of good repute as a committee to preserve the peace between Guelph and Ghibelline. During his administration the Council General took definite possession of the Abbey of S. Benedetto, on Monte Subasio, many years previously deserted by the monks, who, perpetually exposed to attacks from the exiles, had sought a refuge within the city walls. A portion of the Abbey was destroyed, and the remainder, fortified as an outlying fortress, was placed under a constable appointed by the Council. S. Benedetto afterwards fell into the hands of the Guelph exiles, who, when restored to power, entirely destroyed the ancient monastic buildings with the exception of the crypt.

Towards the close of the fourteenth century Gian Galeazzo, Duke of Milan, was everywhere engaged in conquering the towns and states of Italy. He already held Perugia, when the Assisians, resenting the rule of Broglia di Trino, decided to offer the lordship of their city to the all-powerful duke. The general council sent an invitation to the Milanese captain, Ottobuoni, who entered Assisi, after a faint show of resistance by Broglia's soldiers, who occupied the Rocca Maggiore but surrendered without bloodshed on receipt of

## *Assisi of St Francis*

a bribe of 4,000 florins in gold. Pope Boniface IX at once excommunicated the rebels, and the Assisians were not long in discovering that they had gained nothing by the change, for the Milanese were greatly impoverished by their wars, and sought only to replenish their purses by taxing the unhappy citizens. The vast ambition and growing power of Gian Galeazzo soon alarmed both Pope Boniface IX and the Republic of Florence to such a degree that the Holy See made an alliance with the Florentines against him. A papal army, sent to oppose the Milanese in Umbria, took Nocera by assault, and attacked Spoleto and Perugia. But in the month of August Gian Galeazzo died, and the position of affairs in Italy underwent an immediate change. Many of the Lombard cities revolted against the new duke, the youthful Giovan Maria; and the leaders of the Guelph party in Assisi, Averardo Guidone Nepis and the Benedictine Abbot of S. Pietro, entered into secret negotiations for the restoration of the city to the Pope. Boniface immediately commanded the captain of his troops in Umbria, the condottiere Mostarda, to seize Assisi; but the Milanese opposed the papal advance with so much vigour that Mostarda was forced to retire. This check, however, was but temporary; the pontifical troops were soon afterwards treacherously admitted into Assisi; and on June 6, 1402, Francesco di Ser Nuto, citizen, syndic and "procuratore" of the community, proceeded to the greater cloister of S. Francesco, where he solemnly surrendered the city into the hands of the Pope's brother, Giovanni Tomacelli. This change of masters did not long stand good; the usual passions raged until the death of Braccio, tyrant of Perugia, who fell at the battle of Aquila in 1424; and Averardo Nepis, now a very popular and influential man, thereupon persuaded his fellow-citizens to proclaim as Lord of Assisi Oddo Fortebraccio, natural son of the late tyrant.

With the spring of 1425 the papal army returned to Umbria and endeavoured to recover the possessions taken from the Holy See. The Guelph party, profiting by the temporary absence of Averardo in Perugia, made overtures of surrender to the papal legate; and, Averardo being detained by com-



ASSISI: THE RIVER TESCO



## *Guelph and Ghibelline Factions*

mand of the Pope as hostage in Perugia, terms were arranged and peace concluded. This peace the Ghibelline exiles speedily broke, and they regained the city with the aid of sympathizers within the walls. On the following day the papal legate rode down from Perugia desiring to arbitrate, and hoping to find a basis on which to secure an enduring peace between the parties. Some success seems to have attended this effort, for when, at the new year, he summoned the Assisans to a conference at Perugia, more than two hundred willingly obeyed, among them being the exiled Franceschino Fiumi, and the Ghibelline leader, Averardo Nepis. Writing of these events, Graziani, the Perugian chronicler, says that both parties rivalled each other in the magnificence of their costumes, arms and accoutrements, and that the Perugians gave the palm to the Assisan exiles. On February 9, 1426, the Assisans assembled in the Palace of the Signoria at Perugia to sign peace, the cardinal legate himself officiating at the altar. The terms proposed by the Court of Rome were read aloud after Mass, and accepted by the two factions. Embracing one another with a fine semblance of fraternal sentiment, they swore on the Holy Gospel to observe the compact, which was signed by the chief magistrates of Perugia on behalf of the Guelphs, and by Guido da Montefeltro on behalf of the banished Ghibellines. The well-meaning legate saw Guelphs and Ghibellines ride side by side from the walls of Perugia, and no doubt prayed that his good work might prove enduring; but he had not reckoned with the character of Averardo Nepis, the friend of Perugia, whose discontent increased daily with the conditions that he had sworn to observe. Long accustomed to paramount power, he could not reconcile himself to the new state of affairs, and waited only for an opportunity which should enable him once again to banish his enemies.

Among those who were especially distasteful to Nepis was a certain Antonio di Messer Michele, a citizen of influence, of proved honesty and virtue, and a staunch adherent of the Church. This man he determined to remove from his path, hoping that the confusion ensuing would provide means by which to accomplish his purpose. On June 23,



## *Assisi of St Francis*

1425, Antonio was murdered by a follower of Averardo ; but the outrage failed of its purpose, for the cooler heads among the Guelphs counselled prudence, maintained order, and demanded that Averardo should be punished by the law. The Ghibelline expectations were thus frustrated for the moment, but the situation grew most serious, and the Bishop of Padua, governor of Umbria, hastened to Assisi to inquire into the circumstances of the crime and to restore order. Both parties were ready to fly at each other upon the slightest provocation, and it appeared impossible to obtain in Assisi the punishment of a man of Averardo's importance. However, the bishop, a crafty diplomatist, subtly persuaded Averardo to accompany him to Perugia. Averardo, as already related, was on very friendly terms with the nobles and other influential citizens of Perugia, and of this the bishop was apparently well aware, for no sooner did the travellers reach the city than Averardo was at once arrested, and safely placed under lock and key in the palace of the Podestà. His Perugian friends, resolved at all costs to save the Ghibelline leader from the scaffold, watched the palace night and day lest the prisoner should be secretly transferred to Rome. They dispatched petition after petition to the Pope, urging Averardo's release, and dwelling upon the danger to the papal cause, should his execution by the Perugian courts provoke a popular rising. With the aid of the legate, the friends of Averardo at length obtained his release, but only as an exile, and after nine months of captivity he was conducted across the frontier of the Papal States. From that time forward Averardo de Nepis lived at the Court of Milan. All his petitions for leave to return to Assisi proved unsuccessful, and he never saw his birthplace again, but died in Milan, a broken man, in the month of July, 1428.



## CHAPTER XXI

# The Confraternities and Institutions

IT is difficult to imagine how municipal life could progress in a city so torn by dissensions as was Assisi during the Middle Ages, but, perpetual tumults, disputes and bloodshed notwithstanding, much was accomplished to promote the spiritual and material welfare of the citizens, and many charitable institutions struck root and flourished in the very heart of these disorders. Cristofani, the well-known historian of Assisi, alleges that Italy was the first country in which hospitals for sick poor were established. He is probably on safer ground when he states that the most ancient hospital in Assisi was that of S. Salvatore in Pariete, known as "Il Pallareto," founded in the eleventh century, the buildings of which stood midway between Assisi and Sta Maria degli Angeli, close to the present high road and to the spot whence the dying St Francis gave his last blessing to his birthplace. With the progress of time hospitals multiplied and grew rich in the city, some devoted to the care of the sick, others to lodging poor pilgrims, all established and maintained first by the religious Orders, later by the "confraternities." The existence of these last-named religious companies or societies, dates from the middle of the thirteenth century, and was due to a very curious circumstance, extremely characteristic of the epoch. About the year 1272 a young Umbrian girl, believed to be miraculously endowed with the spirit of prophecy, announced the approach of terrible national disasters throughout Italy, disasters threatening more particularly districts in which the inhabitants had become lax in religious practices. These prophecies, flying from mouth to mouth in the country districts, caused an unprecedented religious revival. Long processions of men

## *Assisi of St Francis*

and women, of boys and girls, and even of little children, bare-footed and preceded by the cross, followed the country roads, scourging themselves and loudly invoking the mercy of Heaven. The inhabitants of the town joined in these acts of penitence and for a time old quarrels were adjusted and family feuds and hatreds pacified. This revival resulted in the foundation of various "confraternities of penitence," the earliest of which, in Assisi, was the "Confraternity of St Gregory." Richly endowed by the leading citizens, who were mostly enrolled in its membership, this confraternity possessed an important hospital that still existed in the year 1618.

Other parishes soon followed the example of the brethren of St Gregory, and they also formed confraternities. Among the most notable of these may be mentioned the confraternity of St Anthony the Abbot, and that of St Stephen. The brethren of this latter commissioned the frescoes of Dono Doni in the chapel of their patron saint in the Basilica of S. Francesco, and their hospital was still working in the year 1810.

The confraternity of St Anthony the Abbot appears to have been the most popular among all the confraternities of Assisi, perhaps because its members were almost entirely recruited from the lower orders. In the year 1430 the brethren of St Anthony made a solemn pilgrimage to the shrine of the venerable Abbot in Vienna, and also to the famous sanctuary of St James in Galicia. On their return home they founded, in honour of these patron saints, a hospital for poor pilgrims in the Via Superba, now Via Principe di Napoli, of which the beautiful little chapel is still one of the more noteworthy art treasures in the city.

The rules of these confraternities are still extant. In the early days of their useful career they were extremely strict, and included many spiritual exercises, also an extra day of abstinence weekly, the particular day being left to the convenience of each brother. It was absolutely forbidden to carry arms in the city except when necessary for self-defence. The theatre, gaming and dancing, with other grosser forms of entertainment, such as joining in indecent songs, were also pro-

## *The Confraternities and Institutions*

scribed, the rules directing that every brother living within or without the city walls should so strictly regulate his acts and words that all who met him might be edified and induced to follow his example. Much additional information about the confraternities is given by the historian of Assisi. He praises their patronage of art, and quotes from the original hymns or lauds composed and chanted by the brethren during processions and at religious services. Such processions are still a characteristic feature of Assisan life, and one ancient and interesting ceremony, devoted to Good Friday evening, is not unworthy of description. The brethren, being gathered at nightfall in their respective oratories, the prior, kneeling before each brother in turn, performed the ceremony of washing the feet, after which act of humility the brethren passed the entire night in prayer and the singing of lauds. When morning broke, the various confraternities proceeded in solemn procession to S. Francesco, and thence to Sta Maria degli Angeli, chanting the lament of our Lady bereaved of her divine Son, with so great fervour and sorrow "that those who met and heard them, being overcome by compunction, shed most devout tears."

The character of the confraternities appears to have somewhat altered during the fourteenth century, when they officiated as peacemakers between the different "rione" of the city in their constant quarrels arising out of alleged trespass upon their respective boundaries. As time went on, the pilgrimages and processions of the brethren were followed by feasts offered by one confraternity to another. During the fifteenth century the disorders occasioned by these feasts gave cause for grave scandals, so that they came to be forbidden, and the money originally spent upon them was set aside for the relief of the poor. These banquets often extended over several successive evenings, and at the decease of a brother a curious custom was observed. This consisted in reserving certain portions from each course for conveyance to the residence of the dead man. Here, before departing from the house of mourning, the brethren chanted appropriate verses from the lauds to mark the solemnity of the occasion.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Before quitting this subject it may be interesting to give a short account of the Assisan guilds, or "arte," of the Monte di Pietà, and of the Monte Frumentario. The trade guilds were formed about the year 1377. Some of their statutes are still preserved among the archives of the town, and the earliest of these are those regulating the shoemaker's guild of St Crispin. The statutes of the "arte" define the religious observances of members, provide for the protection and defence of their interests, and appoint certain funds to succour and support the poorer craftsmen. The Guild Master, or Camerlingo, was endowed with considerable powers and enjoyed special privileges. He meted out punishment to all offenders, imposing fines and penalties; should he himself offend against his "arte," the guild could summon him before the Chief Magistrate. During the fourteenth century no fewer than twenty guilds existed, a list of which is found in the town registers. Cristofani places the number of Master Shoemakers in 1377 at the amazing figure of 305, a proof, he remarks, "of the flourishing condition of trade in Assisi at that period." It is interesting to note that the number of shoemakers' shops even to-day is disproportionately large by comparison with those of other trades, proof that shoemaking continues to be a flourishing "arte."

Among the interesting buildings that attract notice in Assisi, one of the most striking on account of its imposing dimensions is the Monte Frumentario. Its lofty time-stained walls, towering over the street now called Via Garibaldi, command distant views over the plain, while to the north the building extends right into the old Via Superba. A beautiful fourteenth-century loggia forms its façade on this side, certainly one of the finest architectural ornaments of the city. It has been pointed out how wretched was the condition of the people in Italy during the Middle Ages, and how famine, want and disease were generally their portion of life, and the Monte Frumentario, one of the oldest municipal and agricultural institutions of Assisi, was founded in order to supply the peasants with loans of money and seed-grain. The Monte Frumentario still exists for its original purpose, that



ASSISI: THE MONTE FRUMENTARIO





## *The Confraternities and Institutions*

of advancing to the most necessitous small sums of money, and seed of good quality at small cost or on credit, the buyer undertaking repayment when his harvest shall have been gathered.

The Monte di Pietà, an institution established throughout Italy in the fifteenth century, was founded in order to extricate the masses from the toils of the Jewish money-lenders. Its original conception is ascribed to two Franciscan saints, SS. Bernardino of Siena and Bernardino da Feltre. Usury being forbidden by the Catholic Church, it was universally practised in medieval times by Hebrew money-lenders, whose consequent wealth and power naturally earned for them extreme hatred. In the year 1468 the people of Assisi rose against these extortionate usurers, and expelled every Hebrew from the city, and this incident induced two friars to approach the "Priori" of the people with a proposal to establish a Monte di Pietà, which should help the poorer classes, when necessary, with small loans of money. The proposal was well received, and being unanimously carried by the general council, the "Priori" elected certain gentlemen, among whom was a member of the Nepis family, to assist in organizing and drawing-up statutes for this new "loan society." Special public revenues were allotted for the purpose, and considerable donations were subsequently added by various rich and influential citizens. As years went by, the constitution of the Monte di Pietà was somewhat altered, and its operations extended, but its useful work endured, and the well-known symbols of the institution—also embodied in the arms of the Franciscan Order—are continually to be met with in Italian streets: three little cone-shaped mounds, with a cross rising from the central cone, and alternatively a three-quarter figure of our Saviour rising from the sepulchre and displaying the sacred wounds in His hands and side. This latter symbol is universally known as a "Pietà."

In the year 1425 Assisi was first visited by S. Bernardino of Siena. This saint, a member of the noble Sienese family of the Albizeschi, assumed the habit of St Francis at the early age of twenty-three. Wherever he preached, multi-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

tudes flocked to hear him, and his custom was to deliver his sermons holding in his hand a tablet engraved with the sacred monogram of our Lord surrounded by tongues of fire. The story of the origin of these well-known "tablets of S. Bernardino," conspicuous in so many churches and carved over so many doorways in Italian cities, is as follows. A certain maker of playing cards and dice once complained to the saint that owing to the reformation of life and manners brought about through his preaching and influence, he could no longer earn a livelihood by means of his trade. Having listened attentively to his grievance, the friar advised the man to forsake his former occupation, and to carve tablets bearing the name of Christ, giving him for this purpose his own tablet to copy. The man followed this advice, and so universal grew the desire to possess these tablets that he rapidly amassed a considerable fortune.

In his sermons and exhortations S. Bernardino aimed particularly at healing the divisions between the Guelphs and Ghibellines. In this he succeeded, temporarily at least in Assisi, where, after listening to one particular sermon preached on the Piazza Grande—perhaps from the little pulpit still to be seen in the wall of a house on the west side of the square—the two factions publicly embraced, clasping hands and declaring their intention of living peacefully together for the future. After this scene of reconciliation S. Bernardino, accompanied by the clergy and people, carried the tablet that he had held whilst preaching to the basilica of S. Francesco, where it is still preserved in the chapel of St John in the west transept of the Lower Church. For many years on New Year's day this tablet was taken from the Lower Church and carried in solemn procession up the first flight of the double stone staircase which connects the two piazzas. Pausing when they reached the space uniting the two flights of steps, the clergy blessed the people kneeling below with the tablet that bears the holy Name of Christ.

S. Bernardino, during his four years' service as Minister-General of Umbria, resided at the Porziuncula. He reformed

## *The Confraternities and Institutions*

the Order of Friars Minor, and restored once more the strict Rule, his followers being known as "Observants"—*Osservanti*. He died at Aquila in the Abruzzi on the eve of the feast of the Ascension, 1444, at the moment when his brethren, gathered around his dying bed, were chanting the antiphon: "Father, I have manifested Thy Name to men."

## CHAPTER XXII

### The Rival Families

THE most terrible of all the disasters which befell Assisi after the siege by Charlemagne, was the sack by Niccolò Piccinino, the Perugian adventurer and condottiere, towards the middle of the fifteenth century. In June, 1438, Assisi, with others of the Papal towns, was in the hands of the Milanese adventurers, Alessandro and Giovanni Sforza, whose rule was certainly more beneficent than that of any recent party, Guelph or Ghibelline. Incensed by the blunt refusal of the Sforza to recognize his suzerainty, Pope Eugenius IV procured the services of Piccinino. Hating Assisi with a violent personal hatred, not only as the hereditary foe of Perugia, but also because of his enmity to the Sforza, his successful rivals for the favour of the Duke of Milan, Piccinino gladly accepted the the papal offer, to which was added the promise of 15,000 ducats from the Perugian Government should he capture the city. His army of 20,000 men appeared beneath its walls on October 24, 1442; and when, little more than a month later the city was taken by stratagem, it was pillaged, sacked and burned to the ground, the inhabitants being treated with indescribable cruelty. Strange to relate, Piccinino who enjoyed the most terrible reputation for acts of wanton destruction and brutality, spared the great basilica. Prior to the fall of Assisi, a deputation from the friars of S. Francesco is said to have visited the condottiere's head-quarters at S. Damiano in the vain hope of securing favourable terms of surrender for the city. It is believed that he gave his solemn promise to spare their church and friary, but whether he did so or not no citizen during the long hours of that dreadful slaughter who was fortunate enough to gain the precincts of S. Francesco failed to find safety within their sanctuary. The sack of Assisi continued three entire days; men and women were carried away by the conquerors to be sold as slaves, and the ancient archives and registers of the city were burned



ASSISI: CHURCH OF S. FRANCESCO AND GORGE OF THE TESCIO





## *The Rival Families*

in a huge bonfire on the Piazza Grande. Even after the destruction of the city fighting continued, for Alessandro Sforza yet held the Rocca Maggiore. Failing to repulse the superior forces of his assailant, however, and losing courage, he fled in company with the Guelph leader, Guido Fiumi, and the garrison surrendered under promise that their lives and property should be spared.

Assisi remained in a deplorable condition, made yet worse by famine and pestilence, which reduced the remnants of the population to such straits of poverty that many years elapsed before the city regained prosperity, and freedom from the rule of Perugia. Thanks to the exertions and representations of the bishops, the court of Rome afforded occasional help, and with the accession of Pope Paul II, in August, 1458, a brighter era seemed to dawn.

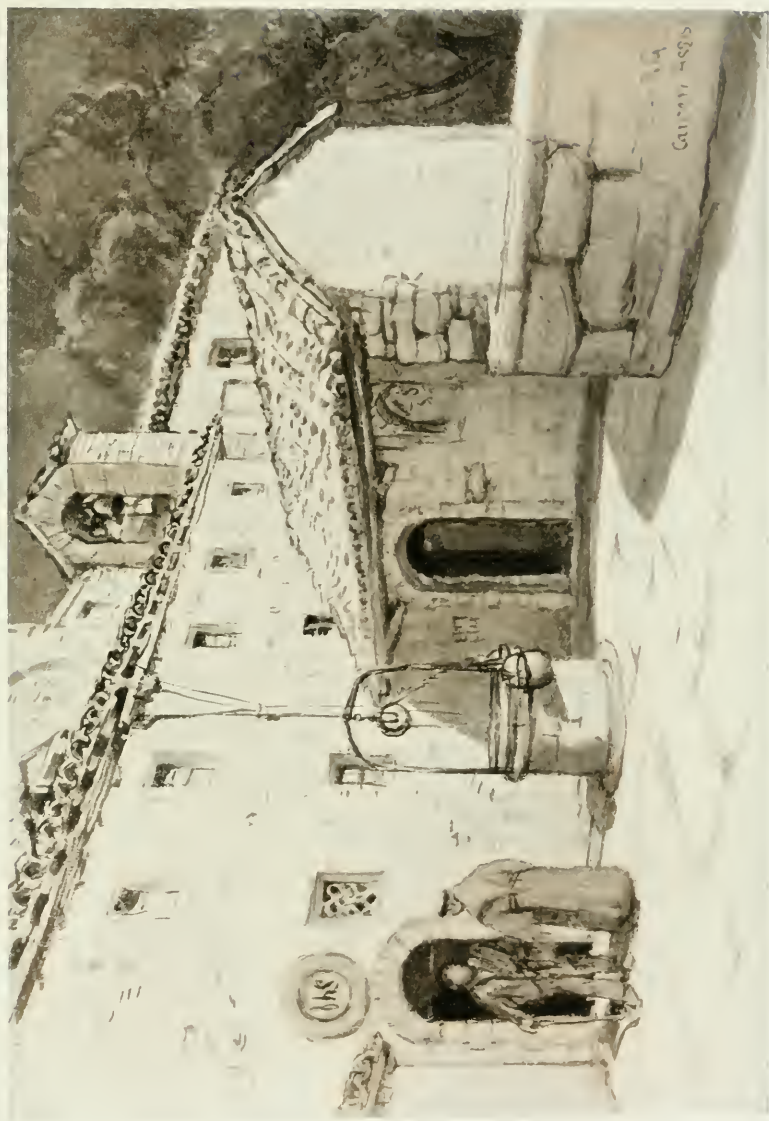
Soon after his election this Pope visited the city, and realizing the sad condition of the people, remitted all taxes due to the Holy See for four years with the exception of one annual tax of 200 florins. He instituted new civil and criminal courts, and established a magistrature composed of thirty citizens known as the "conservatori" of peace and justice. He also framed many wise statutes, and in order to recruit the population he encouraged strangers to settle in the city. The years following upon this first visit were full of promise, but the unquenched spirit of party hatred was destined yet once again to destroy these fair prospects. The smouldering flame of jealousy between the Nepis and Fiumi burst forth when Pope Paul conferred upon Guido Fiumi, the companion of Alessandro Sforza's flight, the castle and lordship of Sterpeto. Quarrels between the adherents of the two parties became so frequent that in 1488 the recently elected Pope Innocent dispatched his brother, Maurizio Cibo, to restore peace between the rival Assisan families, a task in which he succeeded with the aid of Michele d'Aqui, a Friar Minor. In the ensuing interval of peace, the priors of the people continued the rebuilding of the city, in the course of which they constructed among many improvements, a thermal establishment upon the site

## *Assisi of St Francis*

of the ancient amphitheatre in the Piazza Nuova where a spring of mineral waters had lately been discovered. But a new cause of trouble arose in the claim advanced by the Friars Minor to control for their own benefit the letting of the wooden stands used by the pedlars and other itinerant vendors who flocked in large numbers to the great annual pardon of St Francis. This avaricious claim was supported by Lionardo Cibo, governor of Umbria, but the priors of the people appealed to the Pontiff himself, who confirmed this ancient privilege as a prerogative of the city.

The truce established between the Nepis and Fiumi was maintained until October 23, 1490, when an encounter between their partisans resulted in the murder of the Dean of S. Rufino upon the Piazza Grande. An attempt was made to offer reparation for this crime both by granting a public funeral to the unfortunate ecclesiastic, and also by outward signs of mourning and penitence. The principal instigators of the trouble, far from feeling real penitence, however, only awaited a favourable opportunity for fresh hostilities, which occurred upon the accession of Pope Alexander VI. The new Pope at once dispatched briefs to Assisi commanding either party strictly to observe the terms of peace lately arranged by Maurizio Cibo and Fra Michele d'Aqui, whereupon the "conservatori," being doubtful of their ability to enforce obedience, sent Jacopo Fiumi, Count of Sterpeto and the son of Guido, as special envoy to Rome, to discuss with the Pope stronger, and to their minds better, measures for preserving peace in the distracted city.

The three Nepis brothers, Averardo, Federico, and Galeotto, whose influence and wealth were annually increasing, who emulated one another in the state and grandeur which they maintained, and the number of their followers and attendants, had meanwhile entered into an alliance with the Baglioni, then tyrants of Perugia. Of these three Galeotto was the most audacious and the most popular, having many alliances and relationships with the neighbouring small princes. All this was well known to Jacopo dei Fiumi, to whom, no less than to his family, the priors of the people were devoted. With their connivance Jacopo now treacher-



ASSISI: COURTYARD OF THE HERMITAGE OF THE CARCERI



## *The Rival Families*

ously conspired to destroy the Nepis, and trusting that his own absence in Rome would divert suspicion from his share in the plot, he hired the services of three men, sworn enemies of the Nepis, who were to carry out the plot during a banquet in the Palazzo Comunale. To this banquet the priors were to invite the members of both families on the pretext of bringing about a solemn reconciliation which should fully reassure the Pope, satisfy his commands, and offer a pledge of good faith to the citizens.

The good faith of the Priors' invitation was apparently not doubted. Almost the first guests to arrive were Averardo and Federigo, confident and unarmed; and as they crossed the threshold, the hired assassins fell upon them with daggers. In the terrible slaughter of the Nepis and their friends which followed, the Fiumi vented their hatred by treating the dead bodies of their foes with every indignity. Galeotto de Nepis, however, escaped unhurt. Horror and confusion reigned in the Palazzo Comunale; the guilty Priors fled, leaving two of their number, Giorgio di Pietro and Antonio de' Pelagalli, who apparently had no share in the crime, to attempt to restore order. But these terrible events were no sooner known than the city flew to arms, and the night was spent in fighting and pillage.

Galeotto, with a few followers, rode to Perugia, but finding Gianpaolo and Carlo Baglioni absent, followed them to Bastia. Here the allies spent some days in gathering men-at-arms from Spello and Cannara. Marching upon Assisi, they effected an entrance unopposed through the Piazza of S. Francesco, and attacking the lower town, where the Fiumi had their palaces, killed, destroyed and gathered prisoners; but learning from certain partisans of the Nepis that many of the rich citizens had taken refuge with their treasures in the monastery of S. Francesco, the Perugians turned back to assault it. The strong walls of the friary stoutly resisted this attack, whereupon fire was set to the wooden doors of the church, and the Baglioni entering the building with naked swords, fell to the work of murder and robbery even within the sanctuary itself. The Baglioni had continued this work for two days when news of the near

## *Assisi of St Francis*

approach of Niccolò Orsini, the Papal Captain-General, caused the Baglioni and their followers—adventurers from every quarter of the Perugian territory—to abandon the city, which Orsini entered and attempted to pacify. Such disasters might well have taught the Assisians the necessity of unity, and of making common cause in the defence of their liberties and the common weal. The history of the city, however, continues to repeat the old story of feuds and murders, over-taxation by the Pope, and the oppression now of the Fiumi, now of the Nepis, the latter always supported by the Baglioni. These things brought Assisi to the brink of ruin in 1499, when it was for the last time conquered by Perugia. At that time Count Alexander Fiumi, son of Jacopo, who was supreme in the city, chose to trifle with the Baglioni, even to the extent of breaking his treaties with them, raiding Perugian territory and robbing its citizens. The exasperated Perugians finally retorted by sending an expedition under Astorre Baglioni. “And that time,” writes Francesco Matarazzo,\* “the enemy were chased even unto the gates of the city of Assisi, and Count Alexander himself hardly escaped. Yea, had it not been for the wonderfully swift horse that he rode, he would have fallen together with the rest of his men; for few were they who fled betimes, or made shift to hide themselves, but nearly all were left upon the field of battle. So it came about that His Highness Messer Astorre returned again with great triumph.” The picture of disaster and slaughter may be concluded with a pitiable description of the condition of Assisi at the beginning of the sixteenth century, quoted by Cristofani from a Venetian historian of the period:† “Assisi was nearly ruined by factions and civil discords, and from whatever point one gazed upon the city it appeared to consist of walls alone, and to be destitute of inhabitants.”

\* *Chronicles of the City of Perugia*, 1492-1503, translated by Edward Strachan Morgan.

† *Descrizione di tutta Italia*, Leandro Albert, Venezia, 1553.



## CHAPTER XXIII

# Assisi Incorporated into the Papal States

THE long and terrible sufferings inflicted upon Assisi by her own sons did not terminate with the treaty signed with Perugia after the expedition of Astorre Baglioni. Matarazzo, describing the condition of Assisi at the end of the fifteenth century, writes: "Within the city there was so great sickness and pestilence as the tongue of man cannot tell; and to fill up the measure of woe, there was in Assisi such dearth and famine as never had been aforetime. And I myself with my own tongue have spoken with men who were at that time in that same city of Assisi, who when they called to mind that season of famine, pestilence, and war, were all wet with tears, and if a thousand times in a day they should have spoken of these, a thousand times would they have wept, right bitterly, so gruesome a tale was it to remember. Nay, not only those who told the story wept, but also whoso heard them; and they said that men went hunting about the walls of the city, and behind sheds or stables, and wherever else they might, if so, they could find wild chicory or other weeds to eat; and by reason of the hunger that was upon them they cooked and ate weeds of every kind, and many people kept themselves alive with three or four nuts sodden in wine. . . . And so many other things they told that there was indeed a pitiable tale to hear."

So soon as terms with Perugia had been arranged, the Assisians petitioned Pope Alexander VI to appoint as Governors of the two citadels men who were adherents neither of the Fiumi nor of the Nepis, and who would remain neutral; and as the demoralizing influences of the times had invaded the cloister, destroying religious discipline and causing frequent scandals, they further begged that the friars of S. Francesco and the nuns of Sta Chiara might be removed and replaced

## *Assisi of St Francis*

by other members of the Order. The municipal councils, in spite of every effort, were seriously hampered in the work of rebuilding and in the restoration of the city by want of funds. Constantly delayed by renewed local disorders and the enmity of Perugia, this work was finally brought to a complete standstill by Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentinois, who, early in the year 1500, invaded the Romagna, afterwards entering Umbria and capturing first Perugia and subsequently Assisi. As Matarazzo relates, he treated Assisi far more cruelly than the other towns he had conquered, and from his dealings with his vanquished enemies it may well be that Assisi was reduced to the last stage of despair. By the end of March the Duke of Valentinois was master of a vast territory conquered in the name of the Church; he then returned to Assisi, "from which all the men of honourable birth had fled, for they would not await his coming seeing that he was their enemy. But the whole city was sacked and plundered, and some few women were ravished from it, and nothing was spared save what was in the monasteries."

Cesare Borgia's conquest marks an important era in the history of Assisi, which finally lost its independence in this last desperate struggle. Henceforth, subject to the Holy See, it was gradually absorbed into the Papal dominions. The Fiumi and the Nepis were relegated to the position of private citizens, and with the accession of Pope Paul III, in 1539, Perugia also ceased to be a source of menace. The subjection of that turbulent city, the last barrier between Umbria and the Papal supremacy, was the outcome of Paul's action in raising the Salt tax in Umbria soon after his election to the Papal throne. The cities objected to this increased tax as a violation of an old treaty between the papacy and the province. The Perugians were especially indignant, and endeavoured to induce the minor cities—Foligno, Spoleto, Todi and Assisi, to join them in rebellion against the Holy See. Their letter to these communes declares it impossible to accept so intolerable an insult—a wrong that would lead to serious troubles; they alleged also that the tax was not imposed to raise money for the use of the Papal Government,

## *Assisi Incorporated into the Papal States*

but for the privy purse of His Holiness. In making this appeal the Perugians forgot that on a former occasion, when Pope Clement VII threatened the smaller Umbrian towns with a similar tax, they had refused assistance to their weaker neighbours. The situation being now reversed, Perugia, isolated and without support, was forced to surrender to the papal troops, and finally passed like Assisi under the papal sway. Moreover, in order thoroughly to command the city and the valley, Pope Paul constructed a huge fortress at Perugia, and strengthened the Rocca Maggiore of Assisi; and in answer to the petition of the Assisians he appointed as Governor a Roman gentleman, Andrea Gruciari, an upright and honest man, a severe dispenser of justice, under whose firm and beneficent hand the future prospects of the city so improved that many who had fled returned into the enjoyment of their property, and the Priors of the people once more turned zealously to their work of restoration.

As the more important buildings rose from ruin, the Assisians employed in their decoration many well-known artists, among whom *Dono* [or *Adone*] dei *Doni* of Assisi, and *Galeazzo Alessi*, an architect of Perugia, may be specially mentioned. The paintings of the former may be found throughout Umbria, but the cloisters of the Friary of *S. Francesco*, erected by Pope Sixtus IV in 1474, contain his principal work—a series of frescoes of the life of *St Francis* painted by order of the custode of his day, *Fra Gregorio Perna*. *Alessi*, at the same time, designed many of the fine palaces that rose to beautify the new Assisi, and to him the city owes its two admirable fountains—*Fonte Marcella* and *Fonte Oliviera*. Assisi was now entering upon a period of steady prosperity and increasing commercial importance. The nobles and citizens, who amassed wealth by industry, sought out architects of reputation to whose labours are due the fine buildings which the visitor of to-day admires as he wanders through the long Assisian streets. Security and leisure also bred pursuits other than warfare, contention, and intrigue; new and higher intellectual standards were developed, calling for intellectual intercourse. This need gave birth to the so-called “acade-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

mies" which during the sixteenth century were founded throughout Italy.

The first Academy established in Assisi, the *Accademia del Monte*, was founded by certain erudite citizens who met on certain days to read Greek and Latin orations, or to debate certain nice points of philosophy; at other times the members recited pastoral poems and comedies composed by one or other of their body. The name of this Academy refers to the members' habit of holding a yearly festival on some beautiful spot on the slopes of Monte Subasio. Here, on a summer's day, they would invite their friends to the chosen spectacle. Within a sheltered glade, or beneath the trees of some green copse protected from the rays of a scorching sun, a temporary stage was erected, adorned with flowers and verdure, before which the audience would gather to hear a popular comedy or drama, or songs and musical pieces.

The president of the *Accademia del Monte* was elected from among the citizens of Assisi, and some of the rules laid down for observance were quaint and simple. No member was permitted to ridicule or mock a brother Academician by act or word, and every one who indulged in such unseemly ridicule was mulcted in a fine of half a scudo. Members were forbidden to discuss or reveal the private affairs of the Academy to any outside person. The *Signore*, or president, had the right to choose the work to be performed, and to impose certain fines for contumacy or blasphemy, and enforce many other rules and regulations too long to be quoted.

The *Accademia del Monte* appears to have been a successful society, and to have fostered quite a notable list of local poets, musicians and men of letters. After existing for more than a century it lapsed, but was subsequently reconstituted, in a more ambitious form, as the *Accademia degli Eccitate* (instigators). The *Eccitate* were on terms of correspondence with two of the well-known academies of Rome, the *Umoristi* and *Fantastici*, and their first *Signore* was a certain Alfonso Confidati, a poet whose lyrics were first published in Rome in 1681. He was succeeded by Count Ulderico Fiumi, a man of letters and no mean poet, of whom it is recounted that at the earnest prayer



ASSISI: THE FONTE MARCELLA BY GALEAZZO ALESSI





## *Assisi Incorporated into the Papal States*

of his comrades of the Academy he composed in one night a drama entitled *Daphne*, which was produced during carnival in the theatre of the Palazzo Comunale, to the great admiration of his friends and of the noble cavaliers and ladies who filled the auditorium.

Notwithstanding the revival of art and letters that marked the beginning of the seventeenth century, this was a period of general decadence, and the nobles of Assisi were nowise behind their fellows of other cities in the luxury of their lives, in their idleness, or in corruption of manners and taste. During the Jubilee year of 1600 many of them visited Rome, and were solemnly received at the gates by all the Franciscan friars then assembled within the walls of the Eternal City, and so brave a show did these provincial noblemen make that many a cardinal stopped to admire, and even the Holy Father himself halted his carriage to inquire who were these gentlemen whose grand equipages and elegant deportment aroused the admiration of the crowd. So arrogant and fastidious, indeed, had these seventeenth-century Assisan patricians become, that they would shrink from mingling with the needy and neglected "popolani," and on the day of the great annual pardon held within the basilica of Sta Maria degli Angeli, would cause high, wooden stands to be erected, from which they would view the multitude surging in and out of the Porziuncula while they themselves partook of sweetmeats and copious draughts of wine to allay the thirst produced by the clouds of dust stirred up by the feet of the pilgrims.

Of the vast basilica of Sta Maria degli Angeli, erected above the humble oratory of St Francis, the foundation-stone was laid with great solemnity and pomp by Filippo Geri, Bishop of Assisi, on March 25, 1569. The Priors of the people assisted at the ceremony, and by command of the councillors a special medal was struck to commemorate the occasion. Little information unfortunately exists concerning the architects of this basilica, which was afterwards destroyed by fire, but it is known that Galeazzo Alessi and Giulio Danti of Perugia were among them, also that Dono Doni assisted in the decoration of the interior.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Thanks to the great annual pardon in this church, vast crowds sought the shrines of St Francis and St Clare. Among them were numerous important and even royal personages, the little hill-side city in the great Umbrian valley being then, as it yet remains, "the holy place" to which the eyes of the faithful turned as to a new Bethlehem. Among royal visitors to the tomb of St Francis, came Queen Christina of Sweden, whose reception by the city fathers is described by the ancient diarist, Fra Domizio della Bastia, in his interesting work preserved in the Convent of S. Damiano: "On December 13 in the year 1655, there arrived in Assisi the Queen of Sweden, accompanied by four Papal ambassadors, and by the ambassadors of the Emperor, the King of Spain, and of other Catholic kings; and escorted by militia from Foligno, both horse and foot, and by a company from Perugia. The Queen was received at the Church of S. Francesco, beneath the baldachin, by the Cardinal and magistrates, and His Eminence Cardinal Rondinini, bishop of our city, who spent much money in dressing finely twelve grooms and eight pages to escort the Queen, with two magnificent carriages drawn each by six horses, and in providing music to wait upon her. The palace of Signor Giacobetti, with others in the great street of S. Francesco, and all the other palaces, were decorated on this occasion as they would be for some grand entertainment. In the *sacro convento* (Friary of S. Francesco) 150 beds were prepared for the Queen's attendants, and truly it was a wonderful sight to behold so great an assemblage of pages and of gentlemen. This Queen was called Christina; she was twenty-nine years of age, highly gifted, and wrote with ease eleven languages; she was small of stature, but graceful. The Archbishop of Ravenna said Mass for her, assisted by the aforementioned four Papal ambassadors, by the other ambassadors, by the most eminent Cardinal Rondinini, the Papal Master of Ceremonies, and all the high nobility of the city and also many strangers."

In grave and pitiable contrast to such displays of wealth and luxury was the condition of the peasantry, who at this epoch appear to have been little affected by the greater

## *Assisi Incorporated into the Papal States*

security and prosperity enjoyed throughout the country. They were very ignorant; absolutely uncivilized, and neglected by the upper classes, living in extreme poverty among miserable surroundings. Montaigne, the great French essayist, who visited Italy in 1580, after praising the natural beauties of the landscape, the richness of the cultivation and the quality of the roads—"the finest that can anywhere be seen"—speaks thus of the valley of Spoleto. "At divers spots there are monks whose wont it is to give holy water to travellers, and to look for an alms in return; and crowds of children who beg for money, and promise to say a dozen *Pater nosters* on the beads which they hold in their hands in return for what may be given to them. The wines are poor."

The traveller at the end of the sixteenth century and the traveller of the present day have like occasion to remember the begging of the children of the Spoleto valley, whose small bare feet yet patter as of old behind the carriages rolling along the broad high road that traverses the beautiful well-cultivated plain, while their shrill voices still repeat in long drawn, breathless cry: "Signori! Signori! Qualch' cosina! Qualch' cosina!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### Conclusion

FEW events of general interest can be recorded of Assisi during the eighteenth century. Under the papal supremacy the city was practically ruled by its bishops, of whom some left a good, others an indifferent, reputation. Of these one is well worthy of mention, if only for the reason that during his episcopate the Church of S. Francesco was raised to the dignity of a Papal basilica with a special constitution and ceremonial. Bishop Ottavio dei Conti Righieri of Bologna, among other good works, greatly assisted the progress of education in Assisi, but was unfortunate enough to fall out with the powerful Franciscans who, supported by the Pope, were practically masters in the city.

At this period the religious Orders were highly unpopular with the laity, and the bishop's constant and well-meaning efforts to improve relations were fruitless. Certain actions on his part, moreover, so annoyed the friars that having cited him before the Court of Rome, they procured the annulment of his jurisdiction over the basilica and friary, which now passed under the direct papal administration. Continuing, amidst these contentions, their unobtrusive labours for the public good, the confraternities of Assisi undertook many important works of which by no means the least was the building, at their own expense, of a second cloth manufactory. Having long given employment to many poor women of the city, this factory was destroyed in the bad days which followed the outbreak of the French Revolution. The influence of this movement spread rapidly through Italy, and a party was not long in arising which styled itself the "Patriots," and eagerly embraced the gospel of the "Rights of Man," with its shibboleth of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity." On invading Italy in 1797, therefore, Bonaparte found many supporters. The French army, advancing into Umbria, occupied Foligno and Assisi, and the following extract, taken from the MS. Diary preserved in S. Damiano,

## *Conclusion*

of which mention has already been made, gives an interesting insight into the temper of the times: "The French had made for themselves very many partisans, principally among the middle classes, but some also among the nobles and the clergy, both secular and regular—weary as they vowed themselves to be of over taxation, and of the too prevalent nepotism practised by the Church. These people embraced each other, and illuminations and rejoicings took place in many cities at the entry of the French soldiers; trees of liberty were in many places adopted as armorial bearings, just as the title 'citizen' was given to all alike, and many municipalities caused the words 'Liberty and Equality' to be inscribed above the public buildings." "But very soon such rejoicings changed to mourning, by reason of the enormous and exorbitant taxes imposed by the French upon the cities, villages and strongholds which they occupied."

The reaction was as extreme as the welcome. A small body of Papal troops, marching to strengthen the garrisons, in the province of the Marches in the late spring of 1797, received an enthusiastic welcome in Assisi, and were royally entertained by the citizens on the Piazza Grande.

Great political events now rapidly succeeded each other, and the condition of the country became so serious as greatly to affect the welfare of the little Umbrian city. In 1797 Pope Pius VI was driven into exile, and a shameful reign of plunder ensued. In the wholesale robbery of churches and museums, which sent the most precious treasures of Italian art to adorn the galleries of Paris, the basilica of S. Francesco or the other churches and religious houses of Assisi, were not spared, and a lengthy catalogue, preserved in the archives of S. Francesco, testifies to the amazing quantity of gold and jewels pillaged from its sacristy by the French soldiers. This document the French Commissary gave to the friars practically as a receipt for the precious objects carried away, but it makes no mention either of a certain famous topaz, or of a cross of sapphires which the Commissary, Bufort, promised to return "if they proved to be counterfeits." They were not returned. The value of the spoil taken



## *Assisi of St Francis*

from the basilica was computed to amount to 1,144 pounds' weight of silver alone.

Following upon these seizures, Napoleon demanded from the Italian clergy an oath of allegiance, on the almost universal refusal of which the religious Orders were suppressed, and all recalcitrant bishops and parish priests exiled. The Bishop of Assisi, Francesco Maria Giampe, a man of noble family, banished from his see under this law, for several years earned his bread among the Umbrian mountains, by instructing the children of a gentleman in good position, until he was restored to his see at the fall of Napoleon, in 1814. The friars were driven from S. Francesco and their other houses. The care of the basilica and its many contents was confided to a French curator who, according to Cristofani, disposed of everything moveable, but trafficked more particularly in the priceless ultramarine scraped from the walls and roof and sold to the highest bidder. After the fall of Napoleon in 1814, Assisi relapsed into the unruffled existence of a modern provincial town, broken, however—in the life and episcopate of Bishop Giampì—by the episode of the discovery and opening of the hitherto undisturbed sepulchre of St Francis. To the opening of this sepulchre, which was approved by the Holy Father, fifty-two nights of ceaseless labour were devoted. The work was done at night in order to avoid popular excitement, but too great publicity was also discouraged, as the exact spot where the body rested was a matter of mere surmise. A vault covered by three solid blocks of travertine was, however, suspected, and when these were cut through, the venerated remains were discovered within a heavy iron grille.

The mortal remains of the Seraphic Patriarch being solemnly recognized by the Church, his spiritual sons and fellow-citizens naturally desired to enclose them in a worthy and precious tomb. The commission to design this fell to the papal architect, Pasquale Belli, and a young Assisan named Guiseppe Brizzi, who, beginning life as a humble shepherd on Monte Subasio, had acquired considerable reputation as an architect both in and beyond his birthplace.

With the restoration of the States of the Church to the



## Conclusion

Holy Father, Assisi, once more a Papal city, enjoyed the constitution which twenty years of French rule had established throughout the country. The city annals of this period are much engaged with the royal and eminent personages who visited the shrine of St Francis, and with local progress in literature and art.

During the winter of 1832 the city was visited by so destructive an earthquake that scarce a building escaped unharmed, while the great basilica of Sta Maria degli Angeli was totally destroyed. By circumstances that appeared, indeed, little short of a miracle, the Porziuncula itself remained intact, surrounded by a mass of ruins, representing all that once formed the famous sanctuary. In the basilica of S. Francesco, which also escaped unscathed—the friary received some damage—many of the poor, afraid to remain in their own houses, sought refuge in the Lower Church, while others faced the bitter cold of winter in temporary shelters erected in the street, or in the open country. Among the churches that suffered most severely in this and the subsequent earthquake of 1852 was that of Sta Chiara, and it was to strengthen and support the weakened walls that the huge flying buttresses on the northern side were constructed. The body of St Clare had rested in this church for nearly six centuries, when the discovery of the remains of St Francis awoke a desire also to translate the ashes of the “Seraphic Mother” to a more honourable sepulchre, but the project remained unfulfilled until the pontificate of Pope Pius IX. It is curious to observe how strong was the desire to gaze upon the mortal remains of the saintly foundress of S. Damiano—so strong, indeed, that during the fourteenth century an attempt was made to open her shrine. The account of this first attempt appears sufficiently curious to be quoted as an example of the feelings and customs of that age. Two copies of this narrative exist, bequeathed by a certain Count Giulio Amatucci of Assisi, of which one is preserved in the archives of Sta Chiara.\* “Monsignore Marcello Crescenzi, a Roman citizen, being promoted by Pope Gregory XIV to the bishopric of Assisi, desired greatly to view the mortal

\* See *Vita di Sta Chiara: Appendice di Vincenzo Loccatelli Assisi*, 1854.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

remains of the glorious St Clare, and appointing for the purpose Thursday, the day preceding the Feast of St John, *ante portam Latinam*, at the third hour, he betook himself with the greatest secrecy to the church of Sta Chiara, attended by some members of his household, and by one friend, myself, Giulio Amatucci, a noble of Assisi. Being arrived at this church, several blocks of stone in the pavement before the high altar were removed and a small stairway of five marble steps was discovered in the opening. This we descended, and found ourselves within a moderately large chapel, in the centre of which stood the shrine decorated with a statue symbolical of the virtues of St Clare, and supported upon the shoulders of four bronze lions. The splendour of this work of art immediately roused our deepest admiration, and before we attempted to examine the contents several minutes were occupied in considering its beauties. At length we proceeded to open the shrine, when suddenly each man of us heard a sweet voice distinctly pronounce these words: 'Proceed no farther!' Half dead with fear, our company fell forward to the earth, and for a brief space I lost consciousness. Gradually our senses returned; we arose deeply ashamed and confused, and departed out of the church. Note: This same Count Giulio Amatucci, who departed this life at an advanced age in the year 1640, before his said death deposited this memorandum in the care of his spiritual father, Brother Felix of Assisi, Father Guardian of the Reformed Friars of the Convent of Sta Maria degli Carceri, desiring that upon his demise all these facts should be published and made known."

The second opening of the Saint's tomb occurred on August 30, 1850, and occupied seven days. A letter, addressed by the then Abbess of Assisi to the Poor Clares of Marseilles, gives an interesting account of the moment when her spiritual daughters, six centuries after her death, gazed upon the mortal remains of their revered Mother. About her head a laurel wreath was found fresh and intact; in her hands the nuns could recognize the flowers that had been placed between the waxen fingers, and in the folds of the coarse grey habit lay the Rule which once she so dearly



ASSISI -  
MONKS CELLS IN HERMITAGE OF THE  
CARCERI.

ASSISI: MONKS' CELLS IN THE CARCERI



## *Conclusion*

loved. Yet more touching were the several relics of St Francis placed by the side of their beloved superior by the poor ladies of long ago—the alb, her own delicate needlework, worn by the “Poverello” on the occasions when he filled the office of deacon; the sandals which she fashioned to protect his wounded feet, and the mantle of heavy white wool, in which Bishop Guido wrapped the form of the boy Francis, stripped and naked, when he renounced the world before his father.

When on September 29, 1872, the remains of St Clare were deposited in their present resting-place in the crypt of Sta Chiara a new era had dawned, and Assisi, partaking in the national movements, gladly hailed its incorporation into the kingdom of United Italy under the chosen monarch, King Victor Emanuel.

Here we may well take leave of Assisi of the past, worn and scarred by many a bitter conflict, yet destined always to be the desire of many a faithful heart, the longed-for goal of many a world-weary pilgrim, thirsting for a vision of the little city on its green mountain slope as the Israelites of old thirsted to gaze upon the fertile plains and flowing streams of Canaan, the promised land.





## MODERN ASSISI

*Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit  
Si bleu, si calme!  
Un arbre, par-dessus le toit  
Berce sa palme.*

*La cloche dans ce ciel qu'on voit  
Douxment tinte.  
Un oiseau sur l'arbre qu'on voit  
Chante sa plainte*

*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, la vie est là  
Simple et tranquille  
Cette paisible rumeur là  
Viend de la ville.*

*Paul Verlaine.*



## Modern Assisi

### I

THE verses from Paul Verlaine's poem entitled "Sagesse," which I have printed on the title to this section of our book, will convey better than any words of mine the restful atmosphere of the city of St Francis. Life there is truly "simple et tranquille," industrious and peaceful, broken only during some weeks in spring and autumn by the rush of tourists, many of whom, satisfied with a flying visit to the basilica of S. Francesco, hurry away to Perugia to find there greater attractions than any the lesser city can afford them. But those who desire, or have leisure, to prolong their sojourn in Assisi, will be amply repaid by the intimate charm and rare delight to be found in its surroundings, for here in this calm backwater of the rushing stream of life, far removed from the feverish throb and malign influences of great world-capitals, much that is good and beautiful comes back to memory and much that is ugly and sordid may for a while be forgotten.

A short time only is required to learn by heart this little town of ancient houses and towers, of fountains, and gardens from whence long trails of roses hang festooned over time-stained walls, and the broad leaves of fig and mulberry trees spread pleasant shade over green spaces, fragrant reminders that St Francis and St Clare loved gardens and loved flowers, and how the Seraphic Father taught that "brother gardener\* ought always to make a fair little garden in some part of the Garden Land," for that all flowers and sweet herbs, "cry out, saying, 'God hath made me on account of thee, O Man!'"

The long sun-flecked streets are linked one to another by narrow lanes and alleys, steep and unevenly paved, grass grown and running upward between high walls and golden-coloured houses. You may, for example, follow the rough

\* *Speculum Perfectionis.*

## *Assisi of St Francis*

little Via degli Esposti, passing beneath the Monte Frumentario and under the heavy archway connecting its two wings. Hidden in this corner is the Foundling Hospital, and you may pause and gaze into the deep portico with its dim fresco of the "Mother of Mercy" and the old, old turn table on which the forlorn little *esposti* were laid and by the turn of a handle admitted within the hospital. Climbing higher yet, the Via Superba\* is reached, leading from the arch of the Seminary, once a gateway in the town walls, to the basilica of S. Francesco, on the crest of the Colle Paradiso. This was once the fashionable quarter of the town, and many a fine seventeenth-century palace attracts the eye in the broad deserted street, breathing an atmosphere of melancholy charm. You may mark them as you stroll past the Fonte Oliviera and the adjoining admirable fourteenth-century *loggia* of the Monte Frumentario, the municipal hospital, and the Pilgrim's Chapel, the latter recalling the pious folk who lodged in the neighbouring hospice bearing the inscription:

The lord bishop commands that  
no stranger shall pass more than  
three days in this hospice, and that  
the women shall remain divided from  
the men, notwithstanding they be  
their husbands, under pain of  
imprisonment, or other such penalties  
as he seeth fit to impose.

On the opposite side of the road, stands the "lodge of the Comacine Masters," a small building much simpler in style, as it is also more ancient than the palaces of the vanished Assisan families. Beyond it rises the Palazzo Giacobetti, so bravely decorated three centuries ago to welcome the Queen of Sweden. The imposing building is now appropriated by the Schools, the Municipal Archives and Library, while a third portion has been adopted by the International Society of Franciscan Studies as its head-quarters. Thus has Palazzo Giacobetti, with many of its fellows, been subjected to the universal law of change and progress, and in many

\* Now Via Principe di Napoli.



ASSISI: THE CHURCH OF S. FRANCISCO FROM THE PISCO





## *Modern Assisi*

instances the very names by which the magnificent Assisians of past ages knew their homes and their streets have for ever disappeared under the new appellations that mark the new era. The significant name *Superba* refuses, however, to be forgotten, but lingers in the mind, conjuring up imaginary pictures of the proud Assisian nobles, who caused such stir in Rome, as they rolled by in those carved and painted coaches that excited even the Holy Father's admiration when he met them driving abroad. Many of these noble families have disappeared, the palaces stand deserted and ghostly, while the modern tide of life ebbs and flows upon the Piazza Grande, and about the Temple steps from which St Francis many times addressed his fellow-citizens. No doubt the market now held upon the Piazza, and the numerous fairs that take place during the year in one or other of the "rione" are reminiscent of the Middle Ages, for the kindly courteous citizens, so industrious yet so poor, cling fast to the traditions of their forefathers. The women, sitting within the shadow of their doorways, still using the primitive handloom, continue to weave cloth, though now no longer of the famous scarlet dye. The men beat out bright copper vessels in the old fashion, so delightfully rhythmical and musical, or they hammer at the shoemaker's bench, or work at mattress-making, even as once did Brother Elias of Cortona.

From the ancient traditions of the country also are derived the processions which, at their proper seasons, lend picturesque beauty of colour and form to the quaint streets, such as the processions of the dead Christ and His sorrowing Mother which mark Holy Week, and also the time-honoured custom of Ascension Day when, adorning their hats and sticks with sweet-scented posies, the sturdy folk go forth to climb the steep slopes of Monte Subasio, striving to attain to as great a height as possible in memory of Him "Who hath ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and given gifts unto men."

On such festal nights the valley of Spoleto and the crests of the surrounding hills blaze with joyful bonfires, and on the vigil of the feast of St John Baptist (June 24)

## *Assisi of St Francis*

every house-wife places outside her door a large earthen-ware vessel (*conca*), brimful of water, into which she has flung a handful of field flowers, together with grasses and sweet herbs. By day-dawn the contents of the *conca* will have received the "dew of St John" in which the elder members of the family will bathe their faces, and into which the babies will be plunged. Collecting the "dew of St John" is also a Tuscan custom, but there exist many subtle differences between the traditions and customs of the neighbouring provinces of Umbria and Tuscany. The Tuscan peasant invokes the protection of St Anthony the Abbot for his cattle, while the Umbrian farmer takes his beasts to be asperged by the priest on the feast of St Anthony of Padua. On June 15, at Sta Maria degli Angeli, or at Rivo Torto, the visitor may assist at this interesting ceremony, and watch the magnificent white oxen, the young horses, mules, and donkeys, clustered about the church door, a brave show in the sunlight, waiting until the procession of St Anthony returns from its circuit of the neighbouring fields. When at length the statue of the Saint approaches, carried shoulder-high behind a double line of the brethren of the Confraternities bearing lighted tapers, the farmers prepare to receive the blessing, while from among the spectators several men step forward to offer the brethren the traditional gifts of wine from big brown pitchers, and fresh eggs in baskets carefully wrapped in spotless white handkerchiefs.

Thus in Umbria nature and man alike combine to delight the lover of the picturesque, for in that golden valley the seasons wax and wane, each in its appointed time, altogether lovely and beautiful. In the heart of it, from her mountain throne, Assisi gazes with serene brow and calm eyes across the world, while round about her towers and ramparts, her palaces and sanctuaries, ever lingers the blessing of her Seraphic son:

Benedicta tu civitas a Domino, quia per te multæ animæ salvabuntur et in te multi servi Altissimi habitabunt et de te multi eligentur ad regnum æternum.

Pax tibi.

## II

Abbreviations used in this section, besides such as N., North, etc., are V.M., The Virgin Mary; D., Door; B., Blessed; Fr., Frate.

**THE CARCERI.**—The hermitage of Sta Maria delle Carceri (St Mary of the Cells) is situated at a distance of about two-and-a-half miles from Assisi. The road leading thither is rough and steep, and for those who do not care to walk the excursion may be accomplished on donkey-back or in a carriage, to which the requisite oxen will be attached at the Porta dei Cappuccini. The Friary of the Carceri is situated on Monte Subasio, on the west side of a deep ravine. The surrounding woods shelter it from heat and cold alike, while from the pleasant paths which traverse them delightful views can be obtained of the Umbrian plain. At the foot of the gorge flows a mountain torrent which, according to local tradition, rises whenever disaster threatens the seraphic city. Cristofani mentions that the torrent of the Carceri rose rapidly before the great earthquake of 1852. For 160 years the hermitage of the Carceri remained in the same condition as it was when St Francis and his early companions, Bernard of Quintavalle, Giles, Sylvester, Rufino, and Masseo sought solitude and retreat in the rough grottos perforating the rocky mountain side (see page 125). But towards 1380 Blessed Paul de Trinci constructed a few cells upon a ledge of rock, and some years later S. Bernardino of Siena, during his sojourn at Sta Maria degli Angeli, added others, and also enlarged the primitive chapel for the greater convenience of the religious and of pilgrims. As time went on and the Order of Friars Minor increased, pilgrimages to the sanctuary became larger and more frequent. But all additions made to meet the demands thus created preserved the character of the earlier buildings, the new being always built on the like small scale, in the same simple style, and backed against the living rock. The rudimentary appearance

## *Assisi of St Francis*

of the friary and chapel have therefore been perpetuated, and it is this feature which particularly strikes the modern visitor to the Carceri. The Friary of Sta Maria delle Carceri was suppressed by Napoleon I, but re-established in 1815. It was again suppressed by the Italian Government in 1866, when the friary became the property of the town. The Assisan municipality now permits two or three friars to live at the hermitage, where they receive pilgrims and visitors to this interesting sanctuary. The friars, who are most civil and kind, will receive gentlemen as boarders.

ENTRANCE COURT.—To the right are the rooms reserved for pilgrims and visitors; on the left a door admits to the refectory and friars' cells. In the centre of the courtyard are two wells, one of which was constructed by S. Bernardino, and is known as the "spring of St Francis." Tradition says that the water in this well was first obtained through the fervent prayers of the holy father.

CHAPEL OF ST BERNARDINO, contains nothing of importance. Among the relics are a chalice and pyx used by St Francis. A small door leads into the original chapel given to St Francis by the Benedictines of Monte Subasio.

Upon the wall is the diminutive although venerable and charming fresco of our Lady and her divine Son, "which," say the friars, "was the delight of St Francis." This little chapel was consecrated in the year 1216 by the Seven Bishops who consecrated the Church of Sta Maria della Porziuncula (see page 113). The small choir was added by S. Bernardino, and contains twelve stalls.

THE DOUBLE GROTTO OF ST FRANCIS.—The sacristy communicates by means of a trap-door and several steep steps with the double grotto of the Seraphic Patriarch. In the first is the "bed of the saint"—a narrow ledge of rock protected by an iron railing placed there by S. Bernardino. A fragment of wood is all that remains of the log once used by St Francis as a pillow. The Oratory of St Francis leads out of his rude sleeping chamber. In it is preserved a crucifix always used by the saint, who carried it with him on his missionary journeys, and constantly displayed it during his sermons.



ASSISI: THE ORATORY OF S. BERNARDINO OF SIENA IN THE  
HERMITAGE OF THE CARCERI





## *Modern Assisi*

**THE DEVIL'S HOLE.**—A second small door leads out of the two grottos, and here is shown a large stone slab covering an aperture known as the “*Foro, o buco del diavolo*”—the legend relates that here St Francis sustained frequent and most persistent temptations of the devil. Perpetually vanquished, the audacity of Lucifer increased, until one day the saint sternly bade him depart for ever, whereupon the evil one in his fury and despite disappeared through the rock, splitting it from head to foot, thus forming a chasm at the spot over which the saint must daily pass when leaving his oratory. To overcome this inconvenience the passage between the grottos and sacristy was made; later, in 1609, Cardinal Alessandro Peretti, nephew of Pope Sixtus V, built the bridge. Originally of wood, this bridge as it now is was restored in 1841. A yard or so beyond the oratory stands a holm-oak, called the “bird’s tree.” This is the tree under which the saint conversed with his “little sisters, the birds of the air” (see page 125).

**CHAPEL OF STA MARIA MADDALENA.**—A short path ascends to this chapel, built to contain the tomb of B. Barnaba Manassei of Terni, founder of the Monte di Pietà (see page 173).

**GROTTOES OF THE EARLY COMPANIONS OF ST FRANCIS.**—Unless properly equipped in boots with nails it is difficult to reach all the grottos, the ascent being steep and rough. Two are easily visited, those of Rufino and Masseo di Marignano, on the east side of the gorge. The grottos of Bernard of Quintavalle and of Brother Giles on the west are situated almost at the foot of the gorge; that of Brother Sylvester lies somewhat above these. This latter grotto, in which was decided the vocation of the Franciscan Order (see page 125), is rather more than four yards wide, and very shallow. Other grottos are connected with the names of later Franciscans, such as B. Antonio Stroncone and B. Andrew of Spello—popularly called “*Andrea dell’ acqua*,” since God favoured his prayers for rain or fine weather. The visitor should not leave the Carceri without following a rustic walk skirting the east side of the ravine, which will lead him to a green terrace shaded by cypress trees, from

## *Assisi of St Francis*

which he may enjoy a wonderful view of the mountain slopes, the plain of Umbria and distant Perugia on the further side.

### THE CHURCHES

SANTA CHIARA.—To reach the Church of Sta Chiara, the visitor should pursue the long Via Garibaldi. Observe on the left the Monte Frumentario and the Fonte Marcella—so-named from a Sienese patrician Marcello Tute, Governor of Assisi—erected after designs by Galeazzo Alessi, 1571. On the right-hand side of Piazza Garibaldi stands Palazzo Fiumi: observe coat-of-arms above doorway—a tower and a wave. Proceeding up Via Sta Chiara, a good view is obtained of the church and convent. On the north side, entering the Piazza Sta Chiara, stands the Palazzo Scefì. Observe a small door\* opening on to the street. Through this doorway, tradition says, St Clare left her father's palace on the night of her profession. Piazza Sta Chiara is a fine open space from which may be obtained a beautiful view over the plain. This piazza was probably once occupied by a small suburb of the town, afterwards destroyed to make room for the church and convent; built in 1257. The architect was Fra Filippo Campello, and the style adopted, Italian-Gothic, resembles that of S. Francesco. Observe the fine wheel window above the W. door, and the flying buttresses (see page 152). Entrance by N. D. The sacristan is usually to be found within, and for a small fee will conduct the visitor round the building. In the first chapel to the left, dedicated to St Agnes of Assisi, sister of St Clare, the two pictures *in tempera* on the walls are attributed to Cimabue (?): 1. The B.V.M. 2. An interesting, but unauthentic portrait of St Clare. Beneath the altar rest the ashes

\* A popular tradition asserts that the many curious and narrow doorways to be everywhere seen along the streets of Assisi were "death doors"—"porta di mortuccio"—out of which the dead were carried to burial, the door afterwards being closed for one year. I find that there is great doubt as to the truth of this tradition, archæologists of Assisi preferring to believe that the steep steps and narrow doorways and passages were constructed solely for defence. The tradition is naturally adapted to the flight of St Clare, who by this act "died to the old life."

## *Modern Assisi*

of several of the first companions of St Clare. The High altar is of carved and gilded wood, designed by Salvator Rosa, 1662. The great crucifix above the organ loft is of the thirteenth century, and the frescoes on the ceiling of the apse of the school of Giotto. They represent SS. Lucy, Cecilia, Catherine of Alexandria, Margaret, Clare, Agnes, Rose of Viterbo and St Scholastica in glory.

CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.—In this chapel the remains of St Clare reposed from the year 1850-1872, while the shrine in the crypt was prepared to receive them; during that period this chapel was closed to the public. The south wall is the last remnant of the Church of S. Giorgio, so intimately connected with the life of St Francis. On the left-hand portion of this wall may still be remarked a few fragments of the original decoration. Projecting from above is the tribune of the nuns, and beneath it a small door through which the visitor may see the miraculous crucifix—brought from S. Damiano—praying before which St Francis heard the mystical words: “Francis, go and repair My house.” The iron grille closing this aperture is the grille through which the nuns receive Holy Communion.

THE APSE.—The frescoes in the apse are of the fifteenth-century school of Simone Memmi or Martino.

SUBJECTS.—On the wall behind the altar the Blessed Virgin Mary surrounded by SS. Francis, Michael the Archangel, Jerome and Clare. Above, the depositions from the Cross, and the burial and resurrection of our Lord. On the N. wall the Annunciation; below it St George slaying the Dragon, the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi.

THE CRYPT contains a chapel (1850-1872) richly adorned with marbles in which, behind a wrought iron grating, enclosed in a crystal casket, lies the body of St Clare, clad in her habit and black veil. A nun will, if desired, draw the curtain that conceals the shrine; it is usual to leave in the box placed for that purpose an alms for the benefit of the convent.

CHIESA NUOVA. This church, built in the form of a Greek cross by Fra Filippo da Cerchiara for King Philip III of Spain, covers the site of Pietro Bernardone's house. It is in

## *Assisi of St Francis*

charge of Capuchin Friars Minor, and is still under the protection of the Spanish Sovereign. Little of the home of St Francis remains, and the visitor will find little to detain him here.

S. DAMIANO.—From the Piazza Sta Chiara the road to S. Damiano lies through the Porta Nuova and slightly to the right. The steep descent is bordered by the hedgerows and olive gardens. On the left are the ruins of an ancient Roman mausoleum. A few yards beyond is the Chapel of S. Francescuccio, or Little S. Francesco, containing nothing of interest. It is possible to drive as far as the north angle of the wall surrounding the convent, and from thence a few minutes bring the visitor to the church gate. Through this, on the right-hand side of the porch, is the Chapel of St Jerome, formerly the dwelling of the priest who befriended St Francis. It contains a charming altarpiece by Tiberio di Diotalle, known as Tiberio d' Assisi, pupil of Perugino, end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Subjects, our Lady seated, holding the divine Child, attended by SS. Francis, Clare, Bernardino of Siena, and Jerome. Behind is a wide landscape; on the walls to right and left SS. Roch and Sebastian. Before entering the church notice the wooden doorways with pierced upper panels, the coat of arms adorning the façade, and the shield of the Marquess of Ripon, present owner of the Church and Friary of S. Damiano. The small window in the upper left wall, surrounded by a faded and indifferent sixteenth-century fresco, is supposed to be that by which in 1244 the troops of Frederick II endeavoured to force an entrance into the convent.

INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH.—Rectangular in shape, length from doorway to high altar measures ten yards, width about five yards. The walls are black from age, and church and contents are on an unusually small scale. Beginning from the north side, first chapel—*of the relics*. Above the altar in a recess are many interesting relics of St Clare. (1) Her breviary, thus described by Monsieur Paul Sabatier,\* “an admirable manuscript, written by B. Leo on parchment in double columns. It comprises Part I the Psalter, II the

\* Note to *Speculum Perfectionis*, ed. P. Sabatier, Paris, 1898.

## *Modern Assisi*

Missal and Breviary. On the third folio page the date may be read A.D. MCCXXII, this may indicate the date on which B. Leo began his work. The authenticity of the handwriting of the breviary has been assured by a very close comparison between it and the writing of the Benediction given to B. Leo by St Francis, preserved in the treasury of St Francesco." (2) The original bell that served St Clare to call the nuns to choir. (3) A tabernacle of alabaster containing the ivory box in which St Clare was permitted to keep the Blessed Sacrament. (4) A bronze reliquary given by Pope Innocent IV to the Abbess, and a pewter chalice from which she received the ablutions after communicating.

SECOND CHAPEL contains the body of B. Anthony Stroncone, F.M. Returning, and beginning on the south side of entrance door. Immediately to the right is a small window, now closed, and recess into which St Francis flung the purse of money refused by the priest. On the walls may be traced fragments of interesting thirteenth-century frescoes, representing episodes in the life of St Francis—Bernardone beating his son who kneels before him, portrait of the priest gazing upon St Francis in admiration of his piety, St Francis offering money to the priest, St Francis praying in S. Damiano, and a figure of St Agnes.

THE CHAPEL OF THE CRUCIFIX.—The very beautiful fifteenth-century crucifix above the altar, carved in wood, by Fr. Innocenza da Palermo, is accounted miraculous, and is surrounded by many votive offerings.

Passing behind the high altar, the visitor finds himself in the Friars' Choir constructed in 1504. The following inscription may be read on the walls: "Non vox sed votum, non clamor sed amor, non cordula sed cor, psallit in aure Dei." The friars' stalls are of walnut wood, and the spot is shown where once stood the miraculous crucifix—now removed to Sta Chiara—which spoke to St Francis.

A door on the right hand admits to a small vestibule, once the nuns' burying-place. To the left is the ancient choir of St Clare, containing the thirteen stalls of the first "Poor Ladies." The stained glass in the small lancet windows is good. The large "Crucifixion," with the B.V.M. and St John,



## *Assisi of St Francis*

on the wall above the altar, is by an unknown painter. Inside the rough niche in the north wall is painted a figure of St Francis, who is supposed to have lain here concealed from the wrath of Bernardone. The small aperture above is the grille through which St Clare and her companions received Holy Communion; and before this the bier of St Francis was deposited for the abbess and her nuns to take a last farewell of their spiritual father. Returning to the vestibule, where are some early tombs of the nuns, the sacristy is entered on the right. Here little is of interest save a wooden reliquary most delicately carved. In old times the convent parlour and this sacristy were believed to cover the site of the hut in which St Francis composed the "Canticle of Brother Sun." Returning through the vestibule, a rude and steep staircase leads to the Oratory of St Clare, decorated with frescoes of the school of Giotto. To right of the altar a recess, now protected by glass, once held the tabernacle containing the Sacred Host. In this oratory St Clare, surrounded by her nuns, prayed for the deliverance of the convent and the city from the soldiers of Frederic II. A small window in the wall permits ladies to view what was once the nuns' dormitory but is now "clausura." At the extreme end is the walled-in window of the assault. Returning through the oratory and proceeding downstairs, a low door to the left admits to a narrow paved terrace, once the garden of St Clare. Continuing and re-entering the friars' choir, another opening gives ladies an opportunity of seeing the nuns' refectory, now used as that of the friars. This is the most ancient portion of the building, and is quite unchanged. The windows overlook the gardens of the friary, and the seat of St Clare is marked by a simple cross of wood.

As the cell of St Clare and the cloisters are now within the monastic enclosure, they can be visited by men only. The cell of the saint, forming part of the present infirmary, is divided off by a wooden screen which bears the following inscription: "Hic mortua est beatissima Clara." The cloisters contain two frescoes—by Eusebio Sangiorgi, 1507—of the Annunciation, and St Francis receiving the Stigmata. The former is particularly charming. The friary of S. Damiano





ASSISI: PIAZZA INTERIORE DI S. FRANCESCO, SHOWING THE LOGGIA AND THE  
TWO CHURCHES OF S. FRANCESCO



## *Modern Assisi*

was suppressed by the Italian Government in the year 1860, but was saved from desecration by the present Marquis of Ripon, who bought the property and reinstated the friars of the Strict Observance.

S. FRANCESCO.—Entering the city by the Porta S. Francesco the street to the left leads immediately to the Piazza Inferiore di S. Francesco, surrounded on three sides by the fourteenth-century Loggie, built as a protection to the pilgrims from the weather. From the Piazza a good view is obtained of the Lower and Upper Churches, the Friary, and the lofty Belfry, or “campanile.” A flight of steps connects the Lower with the Upper Piazza, upon which is the entrance to the Upper Church.

THE BELFRY. Romanesque in style, this is said to have been built during the minister-generalship of Brother Elias by contributions from all the provincial ministers of the Order. Of the bells, cast by Bartolomeo of Pisa, and his son Loteringio, one bears a Latin inscription recording the fact that it was cast during the pontificate of Pope Gregory IX, the reign of Frederic II, and the lifetime of the “pious brother Elias.” A second bell is inscribed: “F. Elias fieri fecit. Bartholomeus pisanus me fecit cum Loteringio filio eius: Ora pro nobis, beate Francisce: ave Maria, gratia plena. Alleluia.”

LOWER CHURCH. Signor Adolfo Venturi, the latest authority on the famous Basilica of St Francesco, does not identify the architect of the Lower Church. He remarks: “A brief period of time probably sufficed for the evolution from the hesitating Gothic of the Lower Church to the soaring and perfect proportions of the Upper Church, and the greatly varying architecture of both was designed by different minds, and carried to fruition by different hands.”

ENTRANCE. Before entering, observe well the beautiful proportions of the porch supported on the shoulders of lions, the frescoes and window, and the doors carved by Niccolò da Gubbio, 1550.

THE INTERIOR. From the porch the visitor steps directly into the east transept. Together with the side chapels this

## *Assisi of St Francis*

was added to the original structure in the fourteenth century.\*

EAST WALL. A fourteenth-century monument to a member of the Cerchi family of Florence, hitherto believed to be the tomb of Niccolò Specchi of Assisi, physician to Pope Nicholas V. The Cerchi family was devoted to St Francis, and counted among its members B. Umiliana, of the Third Order, and Fr Arrigo, founder of the Cerchi Chapel in the Church of Sta Croce, Florence. The family arms, a shield bearing three hoops, may be noticed on this tomb.

Above stands a porphyry urn said to have been presented, full of precious ultramarine, to the friars of S. Francesco by Ecuba, Queen of Cyprus (see page 147). Ecuba was, at one time, supposed to be buried in the adjacent tomb. This second monument is attributed by Signor Venturi to Giovanni di Cosima, but although named at various periods as the tomb of Ecuba, Queen of Cyprus, John de Brienne, King of Jerusalem, and his daughter Iolanthe, second wife of the Emperor Frederic II, no authority has yet been able to declare with certainty to whom it was originally raised.

CHAPEL OF ST ANTHONY, THE ABBOT.—Somewhat austere and uninteresting, contains the tombs of Blasco, Duke of Spoleto, and Garcia, his son, assassinated 1368 (see page 164).

From this chapel a door admits into the ancient cemetery of S. Francesco, a most picturesque green spot, surrounded by an upper and lower cloister, and affording fine views over the valley and mountains. Dates from the thirteenth century and was enlarged in the fourteenth by the great Minister General Francesco Sansone. The many interesting tombstones are those of members of noble Assisan families and brethren of the confraternities.

CHAPEL OF ST CATHERINE AND THE HOLY ROOD, north end, east transept.—Founded in the year 1367 by Cardinal Egidio Albornoz (see page 163), who lies buried in the crypt beneath. This was the last chapel added to the Lower Church. The frescoes, by an unknown painter, represent scenes from the life of St Catherine of Alexandria. On the wall should be observed the portrait of Albornoz at the

\* See Adolfo Venturi, *La Basilica di Assisi*, Roma, 1908.



ASSISI: ENTRANCE TO THE LOWER CHURCH OF S. FRANCESCO





## *Modern Assisi*

feet of St Clement. It will be found that there is a considerable amount of good stained glass in the basilica, and Signor Venturi says that artists from Murano were working for the religious orders in Assisi from the year 1308. Among those whose names have been preserved are Brothers Bonino of Assisi, Bartolomeo of Pian Castagnaio, Francesco di Terranova, and Valentino da Udine, of whom the two latter named were employed to restore some damaged glass in the chapels by Pope Sixtus IV, a great benefactor of this basilica. Unfortunately the modern restorations have been very seriously mishandled.

CHAPEL OF ST LOUIS AND ST STEPHEN, first chapel right hand in nave.—Founded in the fourteenth century by Cardinal Gentile Partino da Montefiore, originally belonging to the Confraternity of St Stephen. Frescoes by Adone Doni, 1560.

SUBJECTS.—In the vaults of the roof, figures of Prophets and Sibyls; on the walls, two scenes from the life of St Stephen: 1. He preaches in the Synagogue to the Jews. 2. Martyrdom of the Saint. The stained glass is worthy of attention in this chapel also.

CHAPEL OF ST ANTHONY OF PADUA.—Frescoes by Sermei of Orvieto, 1610. He received for this work 140 scudi from Ignazio Vansini of Assisi, then custode of the Friary of S. Francesco, other frescoes by Martelli, seventeenth century.

SUBJECTS. In the vaults of the roof figures of SS Francis, Bonaventura, Louis of Toulouse, and S. Clare. On the walls two scenes from the life of St Anthony: 1. The saint preaching before the Pope. 2. The miracle of the mule kneeling to adore the Sacred Host. The fine window also depicting scenes in the life of St Anthony may have been executed from a design of Giotto.

CHAPEL OF ST MARY MAGDALENE.—Painted in fresco by artists of the school of Giotto, by order of Tebaldo Pontani da Todi, Bishop of Assisi, 1314-1329. The frescoes represent the raising of Lazarus, and other scenes from the life of St Mary Magdalene. On the walls hang the Bishop's arms and his portrait, an interesting figure kneeling at the feet of the Magdalene. It was during the episcopate of Tebaldo Pon-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

tani that Muzio di Francesco rifled the treasury of S. Francesco (see p. 163).

WEST TRANSEPT. N. end.—CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND ST NICHOLAS.—Erected in the fourteenth century by Gaetano Orsini, of the Friars Minor, created Cardinal by Pope John XXII, 1316. He died either at Avignon or Lucca in 1339, and prepared his tomb in his lifetime. About this time many distinguished personages wished to be buried in the basilica of the Seraphic Patriarch, and to meet their wishes the church was greatly enlarged and chapels added. The tomb of Cardinal Orsini is a fine work by an unknown Roman sculptor, one of several employed on the decoration of the interior. The date is probably 1316, the year in which Orsini was created cardinal, and the Prince of the Church is represented as a young man sleeping. For many years a tablet hung suspended from the monument, bearing a written prayer addressed to St Francis by his “unworthy servant Gaetano Orsini.” In this chapel may be noticed, for the first time, the very fine intagliowork which is found all through the Lower Church, marking the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century. It is used for the decoration of walls and columns, altars and tombs, in beautiful diaper and star patterns. This particular style of decoration is traced by Signor Venturi to the Comacine Masters\* who worked in Assisi. Under their tuition and influence was formed a local school of workers in stone, who adopted for their fine mosaic and tessellated decoration the crimson *rosso ammonitico*, with other white and coloured stones, quarried on Monte Subasio.

The frescoes in the Chapel of St Nicholas relate the story

\* The subject of the Comacine Masters or “Magistri Comacine” is a most interesting one. This was a Guild of Masons, formed in Como before the Longobard invasion. From Lombardy the Guild spread all over Italy, and possessed *Loggie* or Lodges in Rome, Florence, and other towns. These Masons travelled all over the country, designing and decorating churches and other buildings. They were under the protection of the supreme Pontiff, who from time to time conferred upon them special privileges, while they also enjoyed from the civil power certain laws and benefits dating as far back as 643, when Rotharis was King of the Lombards. There is no doubt that Italian architecture derived its first strength and its ultimate perfection from the Comacine Masters.

## *Modern Assisi*

of the saintly Bishop of Myra (see p. 271). Of the original fourteen frescoes only eleven remain in a fair state of preservation.

(1) St Nicholas raises from the dead a boy who has perished in a burning house; (2) he liberates a youth from the power of a demon; (3) he restores to his parents Adeodatus, a youth sold into slavery; (4) the Saint's image is beaten by a Jew; (5) he dowers three poor maidens; (6) he is elected Bishop of Myra; (7) he is consecrated bishop; (8) he saves the lives of three innocent men condemned to death; (9) he pardons a consul who has condemned him unjustly; (10) he saves a vessel from shipwreck; (11) in a vision the Saint appears to the Emperor Constantine and bids him release his three generals, Nepoziano, Urso and Apollioni, whom, suspecting of treachery, he has sentenced to death.

Above the entrance arch our Saviour in glory is attended by St Nicholas and St Francis, who present to Him Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, with his brother, Gaetano, in the habit of a Friar Minor. On either side of the arch are figures representing St Mary Magdalene and St Francis, with SS. Nicholas, Rufinus, Sabinus and Victor—the early Assisan martyrs—SS. Catherine, Clare, Anthony, Albinus, George, Agnes, and Cecilia.

WEST TRANSEPT. The frescoes in the vaulting of the north arm belong to the school of Giotto, and represent the Visitation, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation in the Temple, Massacre of the Innocents, and Flight into Egypt. Among the groups of figures is a curious representation of St Francis and Death crowned as a king.

Two miracles of St Francis are here shown: On the W. wall he restores to life a boy killed by a fall from a balcony; on the E. wall he rescues a youth buried beneath the ruins of a fallen house. Below these two frescoes are three-quarter figures of saints of the school of Simone Martini, of which the most interesting are those representing SS. Francis, Clare, Ansano, and Elizabeth of Hungary.

THE ALTAR OF OUR LADY, west transept, north-east wall. An interesting fresco of our Lady with the Divine Infant

## *Assisi of St Francis*

and attendant angels. Behind the altar an iron grille covers the spot where lie buried five early Franciscans, whose portraits adorn the tomb. These are Bernard of Quintavalle, Sylvester, Eletto, a man of the people, Valentine, who was in the world a physician, and William, an English friar. Of Brother William it is related that Brother Elias, jealous of his sanctity and the many miracles which he performed, finally commanded him to refrain from miracles in future. This command Brother William faithfully obeyed.

THE HIGH ALTAR. This is a double or papal altar, and stands immediately above the spot occupied by the tomb of St Francis in the crypt below. The altar is a single slab of oriental marble, and the decoration of the columns deserves attention. The style is Gothic, and the ornaments of foliage and flowers by one of the Comacine masters. The double flights of steps were at one time surrounded by a marble balustrade, also of Comacine workmanship; but this, with other beautiful objects, has disappeared.

In the four central vaults of the roof immediately above the papal altar are the celebrated *allegories* in praise of the great Franciscan virtues (see pp. 78, 79), Poverty, Obedience and Chastity, and the Apotheosis of St Francis. On the eastern vaulting may be seen the Mystical Espousals of St Francis with the Lady Poverty; on the S. is Obedience, who, attended by Prudence and Humility, places a yoke upon the shoulders of a kneeling friar; on the N. Chastity prays within the keep of a guarded castle, with single figures symbolizing Purity; on her right hand Valour, on her left Penitence, who chastises Voluptuousness, accompanied by Death, while on the W. is St Francis in Glory.

THE APSE.—Lighted by three windows filled with poor modern stained glass, at one time the only means of admitting light into the building.

THE CHOIR contains a double row of stalls carved by Andrea di Montefalco and Apollonio da Ripatransone. The subject of the frescoes in the ceiling is the Last Judgement. A double flight of stairs, leading upwards from the choir to a sacristy, are a delightful specimen of Comacine work.



ASSISI: THE EASTERN TRANSEPT OF THE LOWER CHURCH OF S. FRANCESCO





## *Modern Assisi*

WEST TRANSEPT, south end. This transept is interesting as showing the work achieved in the Basilica of S. Francesco by the Sienese school of painters, the great rivals of the Florentines. To Pietro Lorenzetti and unknown artists of that period are ascribed the pictures in the chapel of St John Baptist, as well as those on the walls and roof of this portion of the transept. The great Crucifixion above the altar on the south-east wall is also by Lorenzetti (see page 269). The fresco behind the altar, representing our Lady with the Holy Child between St John Baptist and St Francis, is probably an early work by the same hand. Beneath this altar lie the remains of the Princess Mary, wife of Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy. The frescoes in the vaulting of the roof represent scenes from the Passion of our Lord.

CHAPEL OF ST JOHN BAPTIST, south end. Here, on the walls, is some fine intaglio work. The triptych on the E. wall may be an early work by Lorenzetti—subject, Our Lady with St Louis of Toulouse, SS. Francis, Clare, Elizabeth of Hungary, Catherine, and Bernardino of Siena. The Crucifixion opposite is by Tiberio d' Assisi, and shows SS. Francis, Anthony of Padua, and Leonard. Above the altar, in a reliquary concealed by a silk curtain, is preserved the tablet of S. Bernardino of Siena (see p. 174). In this chapel lie Brother Leo, dearest friend and companion of the Seraphic Patriarch, with the saintly Rufino, Masseo of Marignano, the man of great sanctity, and Angelo Tancredi, the perfect knight.

Adjoining the Chapel of St John Baptist is a door admitting to the sacristy and the "Secret Sacristy." The staircase to the right leads to the Upper Church. The sacristy contains nothing of special interest, but the Secret Sacristy is rich in treasures. On June 16, 1253, Pope Innocent IV gave permission to the Friars Minor of the Church of S. Francesco to possess missal, chalices, thuribles, and all other articles necessary for the celebration of the Divine Mysteries, and from that date forward kings and queens, princes, potentates and prelates have lavished valuable gifts upon the basilica in such profusion that at one time the inventory

## *Assisi of St Francis*

of these precious objects filled four volumes. Among them may be mentioned a cross of rock crystal with silver ornaments and enamelled miniatures, said to be a gift made by St Louis, King of France, to S. Bonaventura in 1263; a reliquary with a fragment of the wood of the true Cross, gift of Nicholas IV, first Franciscan Pope; and a casket containing the Veil of our Lady, bestowed upon the Friars Minor by Don Tommaso of the princely Roman house of Orsini. The story of this relic relates how Don Tommaso held the Pasha of Damascus prisoner of war during the last crusade, and how the Pasha presented to his Christian gaoler the Holy Veil that he had taken from a church in Jerusalem. On returning to Italy Don Tommaso fell grievously sick, and it was thought that he would die. In his extremity he vowed that he would offer the Holy Veil at the shrine of St Francis, should God vouchsafe mercy to him and prolong his days. Don Tommaso's vow was heard; in the year 1319 he journeyed to Assisi and there made his offering, and to this day the precious relic has remained in S. Francesco, where it can only be venerated in the presence of the Bishop.

RELICS OF ST FRANCIS.—Among these are preserved a pair of felt shoes made by St Clare for her spiritual father, the habit in which he died, the sheets which were spread on his bed, also the richly embroidered pall brought to Assisi by Giacoma de' Settesoli, with which his bier was covered. But chief among these relics, and most interesting of all, is without doubt "The benediction of Brother Leo," a small sheet of parchment written in the Saint's own hand on the mountain of La Verna, soon after he received in his body the holy stigmata of our Lord, and given by him to his dear Brother "Pecorello di Dio." The faded writing is preserved in a reliquary of finely worked silver, flanked with small figures of St Francis and Brother Leo, and attached are many thank-offerings, both simple and valuable. Both sides of the parchment are written upon; on one side are the "praises of God," on the reverse, "The blessing of Brother Leo." "To this relic," writes Father Paschal Robinson),\*

\* The translation of the "sheet" is by Fr Paschal Robinson from the text by the Quaracchi editors.

## Modern Assisi

"Brother Leo added three notes. The first reads, 'Blessed Francis wrote with his own hands this blessing for me, brother Leo,' and the second, 'In like manner he made this sign T together with the head with his own hand.'" More valuable still is the third annotation, since it fixes the date of this precious document. I give it in full: "Blessed Francis, two years before his death, kept a Lent in the place of Mount La Verna in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Lord, and of the blessed Michael the Archangel, from the feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary until the September feast of St Michael. And the hand of the Lord was laid upon him, after the vision and speech of the Seraph and the impression of the stigmata of Christ in his body, and he made and wrote with his own hand the Praises written on the other side of the sheet, giving thanks to the Lord for the benefits conferred upon him."

THE PRAISES OF GOD.—"Thou art holy, Lord God, who alone workest wonders. Thou art strong. Thou art great. Thou art most high. Thou art the Almighty King. Thou, holy Father, King of Heaven and earth. Thou art the Lord God Triune and One; all good. Thou art good, all good, highest good, Lord God living and true. Thou art charity, love. Thou art wisdom. Thou art humility. Thou art patience. Thou art security. Thou art quietude. Thou art joy and gladness. Thou art justice and temperance. Thou art all riches to sufficiency. Thou art beauty. Thou art meekness. Thou art protector. Thou art guardian and defender. Thou art strength. Thou art refreshment. Thou art hope. Thou art our faith. Thou art our great sweetness. Thou art our eternal life, great and admirable Lord God almighty, merciful Saviour."

THE BLESSING OF BROTHER LEO.—"May the Lord bless thee and keep thee. May He show\* His face to thee and have mercy on thee. May He turn His countenance to thee and give thee peace.† Brother LeTo‡ may the Lord bless thee."

\* For fuller information concerning the "Blessing of B. Leo," see Fr Paschal Robinson's *Writings of St Francis*, W. R. Balfour's *The Seraphic Keesake*, and Mr Montgomery Carmichael's *La Benedizione di S. Francesco*.

† Num. iv, 24-26.

‡ The letter T "thau" dividing the name "Leo" as with the sign of the cross, is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and was used by St Francis as his signature.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

The "Sacro Convento" is rich in magnificent vestments, so famous for their beauty and value that the great procession that yearly leaves S. Francesco on Sunday of the octave of Corpus Christi is known as the procession "*delle belle pianete*" or "beautiful vestments." Particularly famous is a dorsal embroidered with dragons and flowers, offered to the Church by a potentate vaguely known as the Emperor of the Greeks. Above the door of the sacred Sacristy is Giunta Pisano's portrait of St Francis.

RETURNING TO THE CHURCH AND ENTERING THE NAVE,\* descending from the high altar and following the S. wall.—The frescoes with which the walls and roof of the nave are entirely covered, were much damaged when the chapels were constructed; the subjects are believed to have been parallels between the life of our Lord and the life of St Francis. The life of our Lord adorns the N., the life of St Francis the S. wall: they are probably the work of Giunta Pisano, and executed towards 1236.

THE PAPAL THRONE. THE PULPIT.—Once an "ambon," this was originally intended for the exposition of the great relics; the small gallery, or "tribune," beside it then accommodated the choristers and musicians. The style and decoration of this interesting group is Comacine; the marble ground is ornamented with much delicate sculpture and mosaic-work. In the arch below the pulpit is a delightful fresco by Stefano Fiorentino—a Coronation of our Lady; in the vaulting above, probably by the same master, are incidents in the life of St Stanislaus, Bishop of Warsaw, canonized in this basilica by Pope Innocent IV on October 17, 1253. Beneath the pulpit is the tomb of "Madonna Giacomade' Settesoli" (see page 136), bearing the following simple inscription: "*Hic requiescat Jacoba sancta nobilisque romana.*" The tomb has been considerably injured by "restoration."

Above the Papal throne a heavy Gothic capital, suspended by chains, commemorates a miraculous escape from great danger during the ceremonies for the canonization of St Stanislaus, Bishop of Warsaw. During the panegyric of the

\* It will be remembered that the nave and apse constituted the original church built by Brother Elias.



ASPECT: THE NAV OF THE LOWER CHURCH WITH THE CHAPEL, LOOKING EAST  
 ON THE LEFT





## Modern Assisi

Saint pronounced by Cardinal de Conti, afterwards Pope Alexander IV, this capital fell upon the heads of the crowd assembled between the pulpit and high altar, fortunately without injury to anyone. This tradition is cited in support of a theory that the high altar was at that period shut off by a wrought iron screen, supported by two stone columns.

FIRST CHAPEL, SOUTH WALL: CHAPEL OF ST PETER OF ALCANTARA.—Contains nothing of interest.

CHAPEL OF ST MARTIN, Bishop of Tours.—In honour of the patron saint of his cardinalate, Cardinal Gentile Partino da Montefiore, founder of the chapel of St Louis, provided in his will for the construction and decoration of this, perhaps the most beautiful and interesting of all the chapels in the Lower Church. The frescoes were executed by Simone Martini, of Siena, between 1322-1326. It is an interesting fact that this master came to Assisi from the court of Robert of Anjou, King of Naples, a monarch who pilgrimaged to pay his vows at the shrine of St Clare in the year 1337. Of the royal family of Naples many were devoted followers of the Seraphic Father; King Robert was a member of the Third Order; his brother, Louis, the saintly Bishop of Toulouse—canonized in 1317—wore the cord of the *poverello* while Sancia, wife of King Robert, and Queen of Jerusalem and Sicily, described herself as the “humblest daughter and servant of Blessed Francis.” The Neapolitan sovereigns lavished upon the Basilica of S. Francesco many valuable gifts of rich vestments and hangings, embroidered with gold and jewels; in compliment to his royal benefactors, Simone Martini introduced into his scheme of decoration their device, the lily of Anjou.

Around the entrance arch of St Martin’s Chapel are eight figures of saints—Francis and Anthony of Padua, Catherine of Alexandria, Mary Magdalene, Louis of France, Louis of Toulouse, Clare and Elizabeth of Hungary. Above the arch, Cardinal Montefiore is seen kneeling at the feet of St Martin. On either side of the window are other half-figures of saints, and a shield bearing the cardinal’s arms. The subjects of the wall frescoes are as follows:

(1) St Martin shares his mantle with a beggar; (2) vision

## *Assisi of St Francis*

of the Saint, who beholds the Redeemer wearing upon His shoulders the mantle given to the beggar, and indicating the donor to His attendant angels; (3) he receives the insignia of knighthood from the Emperor Constantine; (4) he renounces the military career; (5) he takes leave of St Hilarius, Bishop of Portiers; (6) St Martin, while celebrating Mass, falls into an ecstasy; (7) he restores a boy to life; (8) he assists at the funeral of Liberius, Bishop of Tours; (9) the Emperor Valentinian renders homage to St Martin; (10) the Saint's funeral (see p. 274).

Returning once more to the E. transept, several fine frescoes, somewhat damaged, are to be seen upon the S.W. wall and roof.

CHAPEL OF ST SEBASTIAN.—The altarpiece is by Sermei; other frescoes are of the seventeenth century.

Midway down the nave a double staircase leads below to the crypt and tomb of St Francis. The chapel of this was in 1822 decorated with marble in the classical style of the last century by Pasquale Belli and Galeozzo Brizi; but the tomb of the Saint—intact, as it was discovered—may be seen through the iron grille by which it is enclosed. The two marble statues at the foot of a staircase leading up into the cloisters are those of Pope Pius VII and Pope Pius IX; both are the gifts of the last-named pontiff.

THE UPPER CHURCH OF S. FRANCESCO.—As the great E. door of the Upper Church is seldom open, it is generally better to ascend by the staircase within the sacristy. The sacristy contains nothing of especial interest.

The Upper Church of S. Francesco consists of a nave with transepts, apse and choir, and is a beautiful specimen of Italian-Gothic architecture of the thirteenth century. The vaulted roof is supported by two rows of columns, which Professor Venturi pronounces Comacine in style. The capitals are carved with the foliage of water, plants, and vine leaves, and birds ornament the bases. The centre window of the apse is filled with crude modern stained glass, but those to left and right are fine, as also are the windows in the transept. Subjects: Scenes from the Old Testament, and the Madonna enthroned with Saints, German work of the

## Modern Assisi

fourteenth century. The windows in the nave are curious, being irregular both in size and arrangement. They contain no good glass.

TRANSEPT, SOUTH ARM.—On the E. wall is the great and much-damaged Crucifixion by Cimabue (see p. 248). Here are wooden stalls of intarsia work, of which the subjects are architectural. Observe the angels attributed to Cimabue, magnificent in colour and design, painted in fresco beneath the clerestory. The much-damaged frescoes on the walls represent visions from the Apocalypse.

CHOIR AND APSE.—In the centre of the apse is the papal throne. The frescoes on walls and roof representing the death and assumption of our Lady attributed to Giunta Pisano.

CHOIR STALLS.—These are perhaps the most beautiful works of art in the Upper Church (see p. 153). The names are clearly written beneath the various portraits. Artist: Domenico Antonio da S. Severino, 1500. After many years of neglect in the refectory of the Friary this double row of beautiful stalls was restored to the church about ten years ago.

THE LECTERN.—Intarsia work, with two interesting little figures—of SS. Francis and Anthony of Padua—on the pedestal.

The style of the papal throne is Gothic, the tracery above the marble back is carved with foliage, and the two arms are supported by lions carved in the stone, known as *pomato d'Assisi*. The pedestal, formed by a third material *pietra bianca*, shows the lion, basilisc, asp and dragon, in reference to the inscription—no longer legible—"Super Aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis, et conculcabis leonem et draconem." A canopy supported on slender columns, painted and decorated in the style of the Comacine masters, completes the group.

THE PULPIT is simple and severe in style, and is of stone.

THE HIGH ALTAR is a papal altar, surrounded by a modern wooden railing. It is adorned with shields inlaid with coats of arms, among which may be noticed the arms of Malta. The altar itself is of Comacine mosaic worked in pattern of golden stars.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

THE NAVE. The roof and the walls of the nave are painted entirely in fresco. The vaults of the ceiling display the four evangelists, and the four great doctors of the Church. The thirty-six frescoes on the upper part represent scenes from the Old and New Testament, beginning with the Creation and ending with the Descent of the Holy Ghost. The twenty-eight lower frescoes illustrate the life, death, and miracles of St Francis (see p. 250 *et seq.*).

### BEGINNING FROM THE EAST WALL.

1. St Francis receives the homage of a simple man.
2. St Francis bestows his mantle upon a poor knight.
3. The vision of the rich palace.
4. St Francis prays before the Crucifix in S. Damiano.
5. St Francis renounces his paternal inheritance and the world.
6. Innocent III sees in a vision the church of St John Lateran, the mother church of Christendom supported by St Francis.
7. Honorius III approves the rule.
8. St Francis appears to his companions in a chariot of fire.
9. Brother Leo sees in a dream the heavenly throne reserved for Brother Francis.
10. St Francis bids Brother Sylvester exorcise the evil spirits from Arezzo.
11. St Francis offers to sustain the ordeal of fire before the Sultan of Egypt.
12. His companions behold him fallen into an ecstasy.
13. Saint Francis institutes at Greccio the devotion of the Christmas crib.
14. St Francis prays for water to slake the thirst of a peasant.
15. St Francis preaches to the birds on the road to Bevagna.
16. Death of the Knight of Celano.
17. St Francis preaches before Honorius III and the papal court.
18. St Francis appears at the chapter of Arles.
19. St Francis receives the holy stigmata.



ASSISI: THE NAVE OF THE UPPER CHURCH OF S. FRANCISCO





## *Modern Assisi*

20. The Saint's death and funeral.
21. St Francis appears to Bishop Guido and a dying friar.
22. Jerome of Assisi, doubting of the stigmata, is convinced.
23. St Clare and her nuns bewail the death of St Francis.
24. Canonization of St Francis.
25. St Francis appears to Pope Gregory IX.
26. Miraculous cure of a wounded Spanish nobleman.
27. St Francis revives a woman who died without confession.
28. Miraculous liberation of Peter of Assisi, unjustly accused of heresy.

The upper frescoes are almost obliterated.

On leaving the church, the visitor may remark a large umbrella, or papal canopy, of striped red and yellow silk with border of embroidered coat of arms. This canopy is always carried at the head of solemn processions from S. Francesco; it represents the papal basilica.

THE FAÇADE. The great double doors open upon a wide green space, which commands extensive views of the surrounding country, and the Rocca Maggiore with the steep picturesque street ascending to Porta S. Giacomo and the upper town.

In the romanesque decoration of the façade Signor Venturi thinks that the design of the frieze was dictated by the friars, who wished to retain in this building the earlier Umbrian forms and traditions, elsewhere discarded in favour of the newer Gothic. The fine Comacine rose-window is surrounded by symbols of the four Evangelists in coarser workmanship. The little late sixteenth-century balcony, surmounted by a cupola on the south side, is called the "cupola of the Holy Veil": from it the relic is shown to the people on Easter Monday and Whit-Monday.

THE "CONVENTO FRANCESCANO" OR FRIARY.—Open daily to visitors at two p.m. There is little of interest to be seen in the suppressed Friary, and beyond some remains of frescoes in the refectories and cloisters, the most agreeable feature is,

## *Assisi of St Francis*

perhaps, the long gallery called "del Calce," from which a splendid view is obtained across the valley. The ancient Friary is now a government school—Collegio Principi di Napoli—for the sons of schoolmasters employed in the State elementary schools. The Conventual Friars in charge of the basilica inhabit the wing which faces the entrance to the Lower Church, and is entered by the "Door of S. Bernardino," a sculptured porch originally designed for a chapel—never completed—in honour of the Sienese Saint. In virtue of a dispensation obtained in the year 1517 from Pope Leo X the Friars Minor Conventual follow the relaxed rule, they also possess the right to elect their own Minister General.

STA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI.—The road to this famous sanctuary issues through Porta S. Francesco, and winds down the hill to the left. At the foot of the descent, the visitor passes on the right Villa Gualdi, built upon the spot where once stood a leper hospital, and from whence the dying Saint blessed his birthplace (see page 97). The view of the city from this point is both striking and complete. Crossing the railway line, the road enters the Piazza fronting the Basilica of Sta Maria degli Angeli. Travellers will find the hotel, opposite the church, good and reasonable in its charges. The great basilica was erected by Pope Pius V from designs by Vignola, Giulio Danti, and Galeazzo Alessi. The destructive earthquake of 1832 destroyed the original building with the exception of the Cupola and Chapel of the Porziuncula; the Basilica was then rebuilt and restored by the architect Poletti.

ENTRANCE.—The Gothic doors were carved by Barbetti di Siena in 1892. Within is a custodian, who will readily fetch a friar to accompany the visitor round the church. The interior is vast and solemn; in the centre, beneath the dome, stands the Porziuncula. The ten chapels, five on either side the nave, many of which were founded by noble and influential families, are without interest and are adorned by modern frescoes and stucco work.

CHAPEL OF THE RELICS.—The E. transept contains a carved altarpiece attributed to Giunta Pisano.

SANCTUARY OF THE PORZIUNCULA.—The foundation of



ASSISI: PORTA S. GIACOMO SEEN FROM THE ENTRANCE TO  
THE UPPER CHURCH OF S. FRANCESCO



## *Modern Assisi*

this little chapel, called by St Francis *Sta Maria degli Angeli*, is legendarily ascribed to three hermits of Jerusalem, who, travelling to Rome in the fourth century, subsequently founded this little chapel in the valley of Spoleto, dedicated it to our Lady of Josaphat, and enriched it with a relic of our Lady. Passing through Umbria in the sixth century, St Benedict turned aside to pray in the half-ruined oratory among the forests which then clothed the plain. Rapt in ecstasy as he prayed, he beheld in a vision an unknown religious pleading before the Throne of Grace for a multitude of men and women who pressed around him, and crowded the little sanctuary. St Benedict immediately understood that long after he himself had passed away this spot on which he knelt would become holy ground. In expectation of the multitudes hereafter to throng the *Porziuncula*, he restored the chapel, obtaining from the Assisians a small plot of adjoining ground, which he named, "*La Porziuncula*"—St Mary of the Little Portion. Likewise for the benefit of future generations St Benedict is said to have constructed the two-arched doorways of the oratory which seem so disproportionately wide. In 1820 the façade of the *Porziuncula* was decorated with a fresco, by Overbeck, of our Lord Jesus Christ bestowing upon St Francis the great Indulgence. On the E. wall are interesting fragments of fifteenth-century frescoes, much damaged, and on the S. wall the remains of another, a Crucifixion by Perugino. A fine Annunciation by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo has unfortunately disappeared from the N. wall.

The inner walls are bare, and the floor rough; the sanctuary, practically untouched, seems still to retain the perfume of holiness left by the tears and prayers and ecstasies of St Francis and his spiritual sons. The picture venerated behind the altar—an Annunciation of the fourteenth century—is attributed to Ilario di Viterbo.

CHAPEL OF ST JOSEPH, W. transept, contains a beautiful specimen of the work of Andrea della Robbia—a fine altarpiece, of which the subjects are: the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, the Coronation of our Lady, St Jerome in the Desert, and St Francis receiving the Stigmata.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

THE CHOIR.—The pulpit and three rows of stalls, carved in wood by brethren of the Third Order, are interesting works of the eighteenth century. In the cell on the E. side of the choir, once the infirmary of the brethren, St Francis expired. Upon the façade should be noticed a portrait of the Saint attributed to Giunta Pisano. The interior presents the same appearance of age as does the Chapel of the Porziuncula. Above the altar is a statue of St Francis by Andrea della Robbia—probably the most striking, and the most beautiful in expression and sentiment, of all the imaginary presentments of this Saint. The frescoes on the walls, representing saints of the Order, are by Giovanni Spagna. In a reliquary on the E. wall are preserved the cord and other relics of S. Francis.

ENTRANCE TO THE SACRISTY IN EAST TRANSEPT.—The vast area of Sta Maria degli Angeli is believed to cover the entire ground occupied by the primitive friary of St Francis and the early brethren; beyond the sacristy are found the rose-garden and cell of the Seraphic Patriarch. A small cloister encloses the original garden and orchard of the friars. At one period the four pillars standing in it supported the porch of the Porziuncula. In this garden is a bed planted with rose trees, to which is attached the following legend:

St Francis, being sorely tempted of the devil to modify his austerities one winter night, fell into such discouragement that he ran from his cell, and flung himself naked into a thicket of brambles hard by. And suddenly those brambles, transformed into thornless rose bushes, bloomed in the icy winter night with white and red roses of Paradise. A heavenly brightness descended upon Francis, enveloping him with comfort and light, and angels came and led him into the church where there awaited him a wonderful vision of Christ and His Mother, surrounded by the heavenly host. On that night, begun in sorrow and suffering, the great Indulgence was bestowed upon the holy Father.

In May the rose trees bear rich crimson blossoms; transplanted cuttings are, however, said to develop thorns, and to offer no point of difference from an ordinary plant.





ASSISI FROM PORTA S. PIETRO, LOOKING WESTWARDS TOWARDS  
THE CHURCH OF S. FRANCESCO



## Modern Assisi

THE CHAPEL OF THE ROSES.—The beautiful frescoes in the choir of this chapel, constructed by S. Bonaventura above the Saint's cell, represent him surrounded by his early companions, and SS. Bonaventura and Bernardine of Siena. On the N. wall are St Louis of Toulouse and St Anthony of Padua. On the S. St Clare and St Elizabeth of Hungary; on the ceiling God the Father in the midst of the Seraphim. Through an iron grating in the floor of the chapel may be seen the cell of St Francis. The nave of the chapel was added by S. Bernardino. The frescoes depicting scenes from the life of St Francis, by Tiberio d'Assisi, are as follows: St Francis casts himself amid the brambles; St Francis conducted by two Angels to the Porziuncula; St Francis praying for the Great Indulgence; Honorius III confers the Indulgence.

The Sacristy itself contains nothing of especial interest. Here the friars offer visitors little books, crosses, medals, etc., as souvenirs of the sanctuary; as no fees are charged to visitors, an offering may properly be left here.

STA MARIA MAGGIORE.—The interesting architecture of this church is partly Romanesque. A portion was rebuilt in the twelfth century. On the S. side is the Bishop's palace in which St Francis renounced the world, and where he lay during the long illness preceding his death.

S. PIETRO.—The Benedictine Abbey of S. Pietro stands on a wide piazza to the E. of Porta S. Pietro. Particularly noteworthy in the architecture of this church is the beautiful octagonal lantern or cupola of the roof, and the unfinished façade. There is fine stone carving in the fourteenth-century doorway, and the three wheel windows above are delightful. The interior contains nothing of particular note. On either side of the door leading into the presbytery are interesting tombs, and some remains of sixteenth-century frescoes in one of the chapels. Beneath the high altar lie the remains of St Victor, martyred bishop of Assisi.

CHIESA DEI PELLEGRINI.\*—Situated in the Via Principe di Napoli, the porch and façade of this church are

\* See *Della Chiesa dei Pellegrini* Giuseppe Canonico Elisei, Assisi, 1896.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

decorated with a fresco, by Matteo da Gualdo, representing Christ in Glory. Once the chapel of a hospital for pilgrims, this little building is to-day one of the greatest art treasures of Assisi. The interior—still in good condition—was almost entirely covered with frescoes by Matteo da Gualdo, 1466, and Pier Antonio da Foligno, called “Mezzastris,” 1482.

ABOVE THE DOOR are, The Eternal Word, adored by Angels and Archangels, by Mezzastris; on either side of the door St James the Apostle and St Anthony Abbot, patron saints of the chapel, with S. Ansano, protector against diseases of the lungs, who displays his own lungs in his left hand.

On the left of the S. wall is a symbolic painting showing a house from which issues the Lion of Judah. On the roof, a singing robin symbolizes the promise of redemption. On either side of the window is the Annunciation, and below it our Lady enthroned with her Divine Son, who holds in His left hand a white ribbon on which is the word “Fiat.” To left and right of the throne are St James and St Anthony Abbot, with a choir of angels singing to the accompaniment of various instruments. This fresco is inscribed with the date of its completion, June 1, 1468, and signed “Matteus d. Gualdo—pinsit.”

On the E. wall are two episodes from the life of St Anthony: the Saint giving alms to the poor, and an obscure subject in which, laden with grain and barrels of wine, several camels turn aside from their road to venerate St Anthony, who sits discoursing with his monks.\*

\* I have been unsuccessful in tracing any legend connected with this fresco, and it has occurred to me that this subject may very well be regarded as an allegory. St Anthony was a lover of humility; and in that most delightful storehouse of legends, *La Legenda Aurea* of Jacopo di Voragine, it is recounted how, once ravished in ecstasy, St Anthony beheld in a vision the world enmeshed in fine nets closely entwined. “Alas!” cried the saint, “what power may free a man from these nets?” and a heavenly voice replied, “Humility.” The camel, because he kneels down to be loaded, has come by some ancient writers to be regarded as a symbol of humility, and this fresco may thus be explained. St Anthony, seated in the portico of a church, instructs his monks in the practice of humility. The camels, turning from their road, kneel before him, symbolizing the virtue that he loved, while their burdens of grain and wine signify the spiritual graces received by the humble Christian in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

## *Modern Assisi*

On the west wall the story of the Three Clients of St James is told in two compartments: (1) the Miracle of the Fowls; (2) the Execution of the Innocent Youth. The table-cloth in the former is inscribed: "Petrus Antonius de Fulgineo pinxit."

This story relates how certain devout clients of St James, father, mother and son, determined to visit his shrine in Galicia. The daughter of the landlord of an inn at which they stayed one night upon this journey attempted to ensnare the fancy of the son whose person and good looks attracted her. Being repulsed, and full of resentment and the desire to avenge the slight, the girl hid in his baggage a precious gold cup belonging to her father. The loss of this cup she feigned to discover at the moment when the pilgrims would have resumed their journey next day, and the perturbed innkeeper duly found his cup among the clothes of the son. The young man's protestations of innocence were unheeded by the judge of the district, who condemned him to the gallows. His unfortunate parents, placing all their hope in our Lord and His Apostle, St James, sought out the judge at his own table; and when, impatient at their importunity, he exclaimed: "What proof can ye give of the boy's innocence?" The parents made answer: "If, by a miracle from heaven, the roast fowls in yonder dish revived, wouldst thou believe us?" The fowls came to life and flew away while they yet spoke, but the judge refused to remit the sentence. When, however, the ladder was withdrawn from beneath the hanging pilgrim, his feet—apparently supported by angels—rested lightly upon an unseen pedestal: a miracle at sight of which the innkeeper's daughter was seized with remorse, and confessed her sinful fraud.

The vaults of the ceiling contain figures of Pope St Leo III, St Isidor, Bishop of Seville, St Augustine and S. Bonaventura by Mezzastris.

S. RUFINO.—To reach the cathedral church of S. Rufino, bishop and martyr, from the Piazza Grande, ascend the steep Via di S. Rufino which leads direct to the Piazza S. Rufino, at the N.W. angle of which may be observed the very ancient palace and tower of the "Captain of the

## *Assisi of St Francis*

People," now private property. On the E. side of the square the Cathedral and campanile form a fine group, while in the centre stands a sympathetic modern (1882) statue of St Francis by T. Dupré. The façade of the Cathedral, begun in 1140, from designs by Giovanni da Gubbio, is extremely interesting, containing three doors and three corresponding wheel windows. The rich decoration of symbolic animals on the walls, and the carved foliage, fruit and flowers, birds and beasts, round the doors, have attracted the attention of many architects and archaeologists, but the interior, restored and strengthened in the seventeenth century by Galeazzo Alessi, is less striking. The architect has entirely changed the style by lowering the roof in the side aisles, thus hiding the two lateral wheel windows which cannot now be seen from the interior.

THE S. AISLE.—In the Baptistry, protected by an iron railing, is the original font in which St Francis received baptism. In this font also, the Emperor Frederic II, a child of three years old, was baptized in the presence of his then guardian, Duke Conrad of Lutzen, and fifteen cardinals, bishops and nobles, 1197.

THE CHAPEL OF THE B. SACRAMENT contains some late frescoes.

Above the ALTAR OF OUR LADY OF DOLOURS is an altarpiece by Dono Doni.

A triptych by Niccolò Alunno depicts the Virgin Enthroned with the Divine Infant, surrounded by SS. Cessidius, Rufinus, Peter Damian and John the Evangelist: the predella contains the Martyrdom and Translation of St Rufinus.

In the CHAPEL OF ST VITUS THE HERMIT the altarpiece—a "Descent from the Cross"—is by Dono Doni. The marble statue of St Clare at the entrance to the sanctuary was presented by the sculptor, A. Dupré, daughter of T. Dupré.

SACRISTY.—The modern frescoes in the ceiling are by the architect and painter C. G. Venanzi. Here may be seen a little chapel of St Francis, in his days a gardener's hut; in which the Saint would pass the nights in prayer before preaching in the Cathedral.

THE CHOIR STALLS are finely carved by Gian Giacomo da S. Severino, 1520.





ASSISI: PIAZZA S. RUFINO WITH THE WESTERN DOOR OF  
THE DUOMO



## *Modern Assisi*

N. AISLE.—The Chapel of the “Madonna del Pianto,” at the E. end, contains a thirteenth-century “Pietà.” According to tradition, this representation of the B. Virgin was observed to weep when, in 1494, the Baglioni from Perugia devastated Assisi.

CHAPEL CONTAINING THE TOMB OF S. RUFINO D’ARCE.—In the year 1286 this youthful saint was a lay clerk at the parish church of Arce, a village now destroyed. The priest of this village, being summoned to Assisi to answer for a crime which Rufino knew he had committed, attempted to save himself by persuading the young man to bear false witness in his favour. This Rufino refused to do, and the priest, infuriated by his refusal, flung the young man into a roadside well close to Sta Maria degli Angeli. The body, being subsequently recovered, was placed in the little chapel which still bears his name, close to Rivo Torto, but was afterwards transferred to the Cathedral.

STATUE OF ST FRANCIS AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE SANCTUARY.—This, the original of the statue on the Piazza, was presented by the sculptor, T. Dupré.

THE HIGH ALTAR covers the tomb of St Rufinus, bishop and martyr.

THE CHAPEL OF THE HOLY ROOD in the N. aisle contains a carved crucifix of the seventeenth century.

THE PULPIT is modern.

The sacristan will conduct visitors to the crypt, where may be seen the remains of Bishop Ugone’s Church of the eleventh century (see page 17). Fragments of primitive paintings can be discerned on the walls, and here is also preserved the pagan sarcophagus—with bas-reliefs representing the myth of Diana and Endymion—in which, until the completion of the basilica, the body of St Rufinus was enclosed.

THE CAMPANILE dates from the eleventh century.

THE CHURCH OF RIVO TORTO is situated upon the high road between Sta Maria degli Angeli and Spello. Leaving the basilica and crossing the railway line, the visitor passes on the left the two chapels of S. Rufino d’Arce, and Sta Maria Maddalena, which both occupy the site of the leper settlement to the inmates of which St Francis and his early

## *Assisi of St Francis*

companions ministered. The church of Rivo Torto, an ugly modern building, replaces the earlier church—destroyed by the earthquake of 1853—which had been erected above the rude shelter that may be considered the first Franciscan Friary (see page 66). The accuracy of this identification of the site with that of the ancient Rivo Torto has recently been disputed, but no very conclusive argument has been adduced in disproof, and those who love the old traditions would do well to visit Rivo Torto. The visitor to this supposed earliest retreat of the Friars Minor, spared by the earthquake which destroyed the church, should also examine the series of fifteenth-century (?) pictures representing scenes from the life of St Francis, which hang upon the walls of the sanctuary. The colour and costumes in these landscapes of Assisi and the surrounding country are of unusual interest. Among them may be particularly mentioned “The Miracle of the Roses,” which shows the city under a heavy fall of snow.

The return to Assisi may be made on foot by a rough but picturesque country road, which leads to S. Damiano and the Porta Nuova. On the way the ruins of the ancient Basilica of S. Masseo may be inspected. Erected by Lupone, Count of Assisi, in 1081, the crypt, supported by a double row of massive columns, still remains in perfect preservation. These ruins are owned by the Abbey of S. Pietro.

ROCCA MAGGIORE.—This ancient citadel, so prominent in the history of Assisi, has been many times destroyed and rebuilt since its reconstruction and enlargement by Cardinal Alborno in the fourteenth century. In 1459 Æneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II) completed the polygonal tower to the N.W., and the long line of battlements begun by Niccolò Piccinino after his conquest of the city. In the fifteenth century Sixtus IV introduced many modifications and improvements; and finally, in the sixteenth century, Pope Paul III adapted it to the use of his then newly instituted artillery, by constructing, on the S. side, the round bastion upon which he placed two batteries. But, as the troubled times passed, the venerable castle, standing superb and menacing upon the mountain top, gradually fell into decay. After a period, in which it was first used as a factory



ASSISI: PORTA S. GIACOMO





## *Modern Assisi*

and next as a prison, the abandoned fortress suffered from the usual depredations of neighbouring builders who used it as a quarry. On the establishment of the present government, however, the Rocca was, as far as might be, repaired by the municipality. The traveller of to-day may enjoy from its walls, bastion and tower, an unrivalled view of the smiling valley and blue hills and rivers of Umbria. The path leading down from the Rocca to the city passes the oratory of the Confraternity of St Lawrence, above the door of which the remains of an ancient fresco by Cola di Gumaro are to be observed. Lower is the much-restored Church of Sta Maria delle Rose. From here, passing by S. Rufino and the Piazza Grande, the Via Garibaldi is reached. The interesting chapel of the Confraternità delle Stimmate, adjoining the Fiumi Palace may here be visited. In a niche above the porch is a large fresco of St Francis receiving the great Indulgence, with the seven corporal works of mercy in grisaille, by the school of Benozzo Gozzoli. The altarpiece, a Crucifixion of the Florentine school, is worthy of notice.

The oldest quarter of Assisi is in the neighbourhood of the upper town, between the Porta Perlici and Porta S. Giacomo. Here the narrow streets and small tumble-down dwelling-houses appear almost as they must have done when St Francis walked among them, while in this quarter also, between Porta Perlici and S. Rufino, the Nepis built their palaces; their shield—arms, two cockleshells—may be traced above many doorways and on many walls. The outer walls of Assisi were thrice enlarged, and traces of the older masonry may be observed in several directions—in the arch of the Seminary and of Sta Maria delle Rose. The last enlargement of the circuit of the outer walls was designed for the protection of the Convent of Sta Chiara.

**HOTELS IN ASSISI.**—The principal hotels are the “Subasio,” “Giotto,” and “Leone Bianco”; all three are good and reasonable. Excellent carriages can be obtained in the town by those desiring to make distant excursions to Spello, Bastia Petrignano, S. Fortunato, or even to the more distant Gubbio, an excursion that requires about three days.



THE INFLUENCE OF THE  
FRANCISCAN LEGEND ON ITA-  
LIAN ART. BY J. KERR-LAWSON



# The Influence of the Franciscan Legend on Italian Art

ONE of the first questions which we must answer if we would attempt to estimate the influence of the Franciscan Legend on the art of Italy, will be: what is it that differentiates the art of Greece, Rome, and Byzantium, from the work of the Italian masters of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries? If we look at any of the innumerable series of frescoes that were painted from the time of Giotto to the time of Beato Angelico, we seem to be in the presence of a new spirit full of a strange charm, which wins us, at last, by a certain touching simplicity in no way to be explained by their purely artistic qualities. That charm, which so often gives life and interest to work almost destitute of the attributes we are accustomed to regard as essential to great art, is of so potent, yet so simple an appeal, that, in its presence we immediately yield to its spell. Here, indeed, is a new beauty altogether different in effect and quality from anything that has gone before it.

To claim that we have here the whole secret and gesture of life would be absurd. The best creations of this spirit are far less vital, far less perfect and complete in their beauty, than the work of the Greeks in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. They lack the force and realism of the best Roman work. In point of decorative value, they cannot compare with the work of the Mosaicists of Sta Maria Maggiore, or of S. Vitale at Ravenna. And yet, in some way very hard to explain, this new thing excels in its appeal all that has gone before. In its power to touch us, and in its poignant simplicity, we feel that it has been informed by a strange new sense of beauty on the part of its creators.

What is this beauty which haunts the work of these cen-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

turies; what forces have called it into being, and why does it so soon vanish like a rift of golden light in a cloudy sky?

Christianity came into the world long after men had expressed themselves in what, when all is said, remains surely the noblest art of all time, and, growing up in the midst of a ripe civilization, all the art of Rome lay ready to its hand. In the early centuries—as the work in the catacombs, in the nave and arch of Sta Maria Maggiore proves—Christianity used the forms of classic art to express her own ideals, her own dogmas. Nevertheless, the art of the early Christians is a pagan art, and many centuries are to pass before we find the profound religious emotion of the Middle Ages, brooding over the tragedies and disasters of the world, about to disclose itself in a new form of beauty, a strange wistful beauty in which we seem to find an undercurrent of suffering, and a sympathy with sorrow which has its roots in the very heart of Christianity.

This new love, Christ himself it might seem new-born into the world, spoke at last through S. Francis. In him it found its most complete expression, and though his spirit seems to have passed away with him, we find his ghost almost everywhere in the art of Italy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Yes, the dawning art of Italy, if not really inspired by him, was confirmed by his spirit—that humanism which claimed, not man only, but the whole universe, as brother.

What manner of man was this, who, after centuries of disaster, came suddenly into the world crying peace, and went singing along the roads hand in hand with poverty, bidding men love one another? Thomas of Celano\* describes him to us: "He was a man most eloquent, of cheerful countenance, of kindly aspect, free from cowardice, and destitute of arrogance. He was of middle height, inclining to shortness; his head was of moderate size, and round; his face was somewhat long and prominent, his forehead smooth and small; his eyes were black, of moderate size, and with a

\* *Celano*. Cap 83 (page 80 of the trs. published by Methuen. 1908).





THE GONFALONE OF S. BERNARDINO

(After the original banner by Benedetto Bonfigli in the Pinacoteca Comunale, Perugia)



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

candid look; his hair was dark, his eyebrows straight; his nose symmetrical, thin and straight; his ears upright but small; his temples smooth. His words were persuasive, fiery, and penetrating; his voice eager, sweet-toned, clear, and sonorous. His teeth were close together, white, and even; his lips thin and fine, his beard black and rather scanty, his neck slender; his shoulders straight, his arms short, his hands attenuated, with long fingers and nails; his legs slight, his feet small, his skin fine, and his flesh very spare. His clothing was rough, his sleep very brief, his hand most bountiful." This description, so minute and yet so lifeless, is confirmed in some particulars, but scarcely supplemented by *The Legend of the Three Companions*.\* "I am . . . small by stature and of nature black"—statements confirmed again by S. Bonaventura in his *Life of S. Francis*,† where he says that "by nature his complexion tended towards swarthiness." While from the Fioretti‡ we learn that S. Francis was not "a man beautiful of body," but "too despicable and small: a bad mendicant therefore."

It is strange that since all these written descriptions are in agreement on the facts of his smallness and dark complexion, our "portraits" of him, varying as they do in value and age, are no more in agreement with the written word than they are with one another.

Some eight or nine of these "portraits"§ merit our attention in that they were painted by men who may have seen the saint at some time or other.

\*cf. *The Legend of the Three Companions*. Trs. by Miss Gurney Salter (Dent. 1902. Temple Classics). Cap. xvi, p. 100.

†cf. *The Life of S. Francis*. By S. Bonaventura. Trs. by Miss Gurney Salter (Dent. 1904. Temple Classics). Cap. xv, p. 156.

‡*The Little Flowers of the Glorious Messer S. Francis and of his Friars*. Trs. by William Heywood (Methuen. 1906). Caps x and xiii.

§There is a large literature scattered in various periodicals dealing with this subject; while several books have been devoted to it: cf. especially Westlake *On the Authentic Portraiture of S. Francis of Assisi* (London. 1897). E. Gurney Salter *Franciscan Legends in Italian Art* (Dent. 1905). pp. 20-70. Goffin *La Légende Franciscaine dans l'art primitif italien* in *Revue Generale* (Bruxelles. 1905). Bonghi *S. Francesco d'Assisi* (Città di Castello. 1884). pp. 103-113, and Angelini Rota *Iconografia Francescana in Ordine* (Ancona. 1901). Ann XLII, n. 228.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

1. The wall painting, a figure of "Fr Francesco" at the Sacro Speco of Subiaco.

2. The panel part of a triptych in the Pinacoteca at Perugia.

3. The so-called *Giuntas* in the sacristy of S. Francesco and in Sta Maria degli Angeli at Assisi; in the Christian Museum of the Vatican and in the Museo Civico at Pisa.

4. The fresco in the Baptistry of Parma.

5. The panel in S. Francesco a Ripa at Rome.

6. The panel at the Eremo, Greccio.

7. The panel in S. Francesco of Pescia.

8. The panel in the Sta Croce of Florence.

9. The panel in the Sacristy of S. Francesco at Pistoia.

The wall painting of the Sacro Speco of Subiaco represents a figure under lifesize, still young, with eager grey eyes, light brown hair and a thin straggling beard, wearing a grey habit with a white cord, and the hood high on the head. In the left hand is a scroll on which we read "Pax huic Domini"; while above, beside the head, is written FR FRANCISCU. It is a very pleasing portrait, far more so than any other known to us. It has been restored, but not disastrously, though the background has been entirely repainted. In the lower corner is a figure, as of a donor, which seems to have been added at a later period.\* What strikes us at once in looking at this picture is the absence of the stigmata and the halo. It would seem thus to have been painted before 1216, and certainly must have been finished before 1228 when Francis was canonized, since it is without the nimbus. S. Francis went to Subiaco from Rome as did his friend Gregory IX, whose portrait is painted opposite when he was Bishop of Ostia.

In this picture, and in this alone of all those which have come down to us, we seem to have a portrait of the Saint. The rest appear to be less portraits than *eikons*, holy pic-

\* It will be seen that this picture differs in many particulars, especially in colouring, from the descriptions of Thomas of Celano (see *supra* p. 238). However, it tallies fairly well with the description of Fra Bartolommeo da Pisa in the *Liber Conformitatum* (Quaracchi. 1907). cf. Angelini Rota, *op. cit.* in *Ordine* (Ancona. 1901). Ann XLII, n. 228.

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

tures for adoration made in great numbers after the canonization of S. Francis in 1228. Here at least we have a picture which cannot have been made, merely for a religious use, rather to represent than to portray him. That his portrait was painted as a portrait and not only as an *eikon* is certain. It could only be used as the latter after 1228, and Mariotti tells us of a picture as early as 1219 which has unfortunately disappeared. It was painted avowedly as a portrait a *mezzo busto* of S. Francis and bore this beautiful and simple inscription: "Io Tullio pitore di Peruggia essendo stato guarito da questo beato huomo F. Francesco d'Assisi d'una grandissima apoplezia sono andato questo anno MCCXIX al capitolo delle store alla M. degli Angeli et ho fato il presente suo ritratto sopra di lui per divocione ghe io ho in questo beato huomo."\*

That these pictures were portraits there can, one may think, be little doubt and it might seem as certain that the rest are not.

The panel in the Pinacoteca at Perugia forms the central part of a triptych, the wings showing the Crucifixion and the Entombment of our Lord. It was probably painted about 1250 by Giunta Pisano who decorated the Lower Church of

\* cf. A. Mariotti: *Lettere Pittoriche Perugine* (Perugia, 1788), pp 15-17. The following words added at a later time also appeared: "Perantiquam hanc S. Francisci imaginem, ipsique coævam quam et originalis stylus et incompta obsignantis formula commendatæ privatæ diu pietati conceditam, novissime publici furis fecit Filiusque Seraphici patriarchæ dicavit N. N." Mariotti however did not believe in the authenticity of the portrait in which S. Francis appeared with a very long beard. Another portrait at S. Damiano, this time ordered by S. Clare is described by a fourteenth century writer, cf *Codice* 344 della Bib. del S. Convento in Assisi, fol. 63. This *codice* is fully described by Don Michele Faloci Pulignani in *Miscellanea Francescana* (Foligno, 1901.) Vol. i, pp. 145-150. I extract the following: "Item post tribunam, a parte exteriori ecclesie sancti damiani, ad manum sinistram, est quedam figura stature beati francisci, intus in pariete per spatium unius palmi protensi, ad modum hostioli, ad mensuram sui corpusculi depictam, quam mensuram beata virgo clara existens adhuc in carne cum suis sororibus in monasterio sancti damiani reclusa, ut per fratres asseritur, eandem fecit ibidem depingi ad perpetnam memoriam et sue mentis jubiliu, et ad devotione excitandam in corda omnium fidelium. Ad quam figuram tam cives quam peregrini frequenter per anni circulum cum devotione permaxima adorant, et reverentia intuentur, altissimo deo et domino nostro ihesu christo filio eius vota solventes et seraphico servo suo francisco. Hic in presenti per gratiam, et in celo premium recepturi per gloriam. Amen."



## *Assisi of St Francis*

S. Francesco, in fresco, for Friar Elias.\* There we see S. Francis, as he is so often represented afterwards, holding an open book in one hand, while the other is raised in blessing so as to show the mark of the stigmata. This picture is but one of a host, of which that in the sacristy of S. Francesco and those in S. Maria degli Angeli of Assisi are the most interesting.

The picture in S. Francesco is of Italo-Byzantine workmanship, and is not by Giunta. There we see the emaciated figure of the Saint in the habit of his Order, the open book in his left hand, the white cord round his body. The face is miserable and merely that of an idol, the wasted, tortured divinity of the time. On either side are two scenes from the life of the Saint. In the first to the left we see a woman in prayer before the altar of the Saint in the presence of the friars. She is perhaps that Roman lady Giacoma de' Settesoli who brought fine linen for his shroud, wax to burn before his tomb, and incense for his altar; covering his body with a cloth embroidered in a pattern of flowers and birds in gold.† In the background we see the city of Assisi crowned by its Rocca.

In the first scene to the right is the first tomb of S. Francis under a baldacchino decorated with lamps before which an old man kneels. While in the second scene on the left we see a cripple cured by the Saint; and in the second scene on the right the healing of one possessed by devils. The fact that this "portrait" of St Francis is thus surrounded by scenes in the manner of an altar-piece goes to prove it merely an *eikon*.

The pictures at S. Maria degli Angeli, though they too can only claim to be *eikons*, are different from that in S. Francesco. One of them is painted on the first coffin in which the

\* There was a Crucifix at the entrance of the Presbiterio in S. Francesco at the foot of which Frate Elias, the founder of the basilica, knelt: beneath was written: "Frater Helias fieri fecit. Jesu Christe pie miserere precantis Helie. Juncta Pisanus me pinxit Anno Domini MCCXXXVI cf. Frattini: Stor. della basilica e del convento di S. Francesco d'Assisi (Prato. 1882).

p. 44.

† Giacoma de' Settesoli lies buried beside the pulpit in the Lower Church of S. Francesco.



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

body of the Saint was laid.\* There we see a short emaciated figure, the head largely shaved, crowned with a nimbus, the ears large and prominent, holding a closed book in both hands, which are marked with the stigmata. Beneath, in thirteenth-century characters, is written: "Haec tabula quae loculo ubi S. Francisci corpus duobus fere annis quievit operculum fuit eiusdem S. Patriarchae effigiem saeculo XIII depictam praefert." The fact that it is painted on the Saint's coffin, certainly after it had been discarded, proves it could not have been painted from life, and suggests that it is just an *cikon*. It may well be by Giunta as may the other "portrait" preserved here in which the Saint stands between two half figures of angels in a grey habit, a cross in his right hand, the five marks of the stigmata obviously exposed, while in his left hand he holds an open book in which we read: "Hic mihi viventi lectus fuit et morienti," That this, too, is an *cikon* is proved by the exposed wounds and the presence of the two angels.

Of the rest, not one can make a better claim than these to be considered a portrait. The figure in the fresco at Parma is accompanied by Seraphim, and though it be without a halo, one would scarcely have painted him thus in 1220 when he passed through the city.† In the panel at S. Francesco a Ripa at Rome the figure, which is under life-size, has the nimbus and the stigmata which points to a date after 1228. The picture at Greccio, said to have been painted for Giacoma de' Settesoli, has both stigmata and nimbus, though the latter with the S.F. above may have been added later. It can have but a very doubtful claim to be considered a portrait in any true sense of the word: it is, however, one of the most interesting of these "portraits." The picture at Pescia is dated 1235 and signed Bonaventura Berlingheri, which, since S. Francis died in 1226, puts it out of court. While the picture at Pistoia

\* For all concerning this picture see Carattoli: *Di una tavola della primitiva cassa mortuaria di San Francesco in Miscellanea Francescana* (Foligno, 1901). Vol i, pp. 45-48.

† cf. Lopez: *Il Battistero di Parma* (Parma, 1864).

## *Assisi of St Francis*

has been so much restored as to be no longer the work of any one man; and the altar-piece of the Bardi Chapel in S. Croce at Florence is an *eikon* with scenes about it. These last two pictures are given to Margaritone who has signed a life-size figure of S. Francis in the Pinacoteca of Arezzo.

It will thus be seen that these pictures are rather evidence of the vast interest and devotion St Francis had awakened than "likenesses" or realistic portraits in our sense of the word. Every Franciscan community wished to possess a presentment of the Saint, and many private persons who belonged to the Third Order would hang them in their houses. It was doubtless for them that were made the little miniatures of the Saint painted on copper, examples of which may be found in the first and second rooms of the Museo Civico at Pisa. It was the same idea, to be carried out on a marvellous scale, that inspired Frate Elias when he built the great church at Assisi and caused Giunta Pisano to paint it in fresco.

Before proceeding to examine the frescoes there where we seem so near to the beginnings of Italian art, near enough at least to a point in its history from which we may draw some conclusions, a few words will not be out of place on the nature of fresco painting in general, the method it was necessary for the painter to follow.

Coming down to us from remote antiquity, fresco painting was a branch of the plasterer's handicraft; and it got its name from the method employed, which was simply the painting or staining of plaster while it was still fresh or wet in such a manner that the pigments, diluted only with water, were absorbed by the fresh plaster ground, thus becoming part of the actual surface of the wall.

A wall surface properly prepared for "fresco" is composed of three different sorts of plaster, laid one upon another, which vary according to the different kinds of grit in their substance. The under coat, mixed of lime and brick or baked pottery pounded to about the size of peas, is coarsely spread on lathes or rushes carefully laid in place, its surface left rough the better to serve as a basis

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

for the next coat, which is a mixture of lime and sand. These two coatings form the foundation; the last coat, the actual surface on which the colour is to be applied, being composed of lime mixed with most finely powdered marble, is called *intonaco*. It possesses a wonderful matt surface, so beautiful in itself that it accounts for much of the pleasure we receive from a good fresco; while even a bad one is more tolerable because of this quality. The part thus played by the plaster in a fresco is therefore not only essential to the existence of the picture, but in itself constitutes an important part of its beauty.

It is only when the preparatory work is done that the painter, if indeed he be not the plasterer himself, makes his appearance, after preparing his cartoon, which is in many ways the most important item of the fresco painter's equipment. As Armenino very truly says: "Except for the colours we may call it the work itself." All the labour and art of the artist were therefore expended upon the cartoon in which every question was absolutely settled, every difficulty solved. Thus we find painters preparing cartoons in Rome, Florence, Siena or elsewhere, rolling them up and despatching them to some distant place where the actual execution of the work in the wet plaster was carried out by their pupils, or by more or less competent local artists. This practice was probably resorted to very largely and would account for many of the puzzling questions of attribution that have troubled the minds of the "scientific" critics.

The cartoon, thus so essential a part of the work, was composed of stretched paper, pasted together until the surface was of equal extent to the area of the wall to be painted. "Afterwards," says Vasari, "when the sheets of paper are dry, a long cane is taken with a piece of charcoal fixed into the end of it. With this everything that is drawn in the small design is reproduced upon the cartoon in like proportion, in order to judge of the effect at a distance; and thus by degrees, first one figure is finished and then another. Here the painter employs all his skill in the art, in drawing naked figures from life and draperies too; and the perspective is contrived

## *Assisi of St Francis*

by all those rules which have been observed in drawing the design on a small scale.

“When these cartoons are used for painting in fresco upon walls, a piece must every day be cut off at the joining, and this much of the design is traced upon the *intonico*. It is laid upon the place where the figure is to be painted, and is counter-signed in such a manner that when next day another piece is to be joined to it, the place of their joining together may be exactly known, and no error arise. The outlines of this piece are then traced with an iron *stylus* in the *intonico* of lime which, being wet, yields to the paper and receives the marks.

“After this the cartoon is taken off, and the colours are laid on according to those lines which are traced upon the wall; and then the painting in fresco is executed. There are many painters who do not use cartoons for oil pictures, but when painting in fresco they cannot be dispensed with.”

The fresco is begun and worked from the top downwards, so that there shall be no risk of splashing and so spoiling what is below. “The work,” Vasari tells us again, “must not be left until all that is intended to be done that day is finished, because if the painting be long in hand a certain thin crust forms on the lime as well from the heat as from the cold, the wind, and the frost which tarnish and stain all pictures: therefore the wall which is to be painted must be kept continually moist. The colours, too, must be all earths and not minerals; and the white must be calcined Traver-tine. This kind of painting requires a firm and quick hand, but above all a good and sound judgement; because, while the work is soft, the colours appear quite otherwise than when the wall is dry. It is therefore necessary for the artist, while painting in fresco, to use his judgement more than his skill, and to be guided by experience.” It will thus be seen that the painter in fresco can scarcely be an “impressionist,” his effects are all foregone conclusions. The work grows under his hand, finished from the beginning.

The work was often finished in *secco*. This “secco” is

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

simply "tempera,"\* a method of painting now so generally understood as hardly to require explanation. As an auxiliary process it gave the painter a mastery over detail impossible while he worked in pure fresco; but the *secco*, lying as an outer skin on the wall, was apt to crumble off. In the Upper Church at Assisi we have an extremely interesting example of this mixed *technique*, and its consequences, in Giotto's picture of *St Francis preaching to the Birds*. There we can see that the plumage of the birds, so bright and various once, was elaborately wrought in "secco," which has crumbled away; so that the fresco foundation now appears alone, denuded of the detail upon which so much of its beauty depended. I have thus roughly indicated the methods of the painter in fresco in order that we may enjoy his work the more, knowing the difficulties and something of the limitations of his art. I now turn to the frescoes themselves.

On entering the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi from the green *Campo*, we find ourselves in a spacious nave, luminous and warm in colour with patches of crude blue in the vaulting and on the walls. The whole place is covered with frescoes of which not so much as a square foot of one is in a tolerable state of preservation. They seem, indeed, to have suffered every possible violation and vicissitude. Crumbled and cracked, stained, mildewed into blotches and patches of every shape and colour, they have been covered with limewash at some period when men were tired of them, and then hacked and scraped again by enthusiastic antiquarians; for the walls of this church have come to be regarded as the first page in the great illuminated book of Italian art. But of the lovelier pages to come there is scarcely a hint here, for those who worked on the upper part of the walls of the nave, and in the vaulted spaces of the roof, were men who had come into the world either too early or too late. They were the children of the transition period who had neither wholly forgotten their distant classical origin,

\* *Tempera*, in the Italian sense, means any vehicle which in drying binds the colours together; but more particularly it means any medium other than oil, the principal and most useful being the yolk of egg.



## *Assisi of St Francis*

nor emerged into the dawn which St Francis heralded with his songs. In a dull confused manner they carried on their traditional practices; they never learned the secrets of beauty, nor shared in the rediscovery of these laws by which beauty lives.

Pietro Cavallini and Jacopo Torriti, two of the foremost masters of the Roman school, make an early appearance at Assisi with their assistants. The almost legendary Florentine Cimabue, then Giotto and his followers, Simone Martini and the Lorenzetti of Siena, are all attracted here, one after another, to play their various parts in the decoration of the great new church, the work of Frate Elias, that seemed to have grown by magic out of the black *scirocco* clouds that hover still over Monte Subasio. To this day the slow mind of the Umbrian peasant is not quite easy about this *Roba di Prcte* set by Frate Elias upon the brow of the *Colle Infernale*, and the church is still called *Chiesa del Diavolo*. So on feast days the peasants come to Padre Lorenzo and say: "Padre, show us the Devil's Church!" And the Devil's Church they are shown with all its uncanny wonders. Padre Lorenzo, though something more discriminating, has an almost equally satisfactory solution, not of the building of the church certainly, but of the artistic puzzles in it. He is in no way perturbed by the fact that the basilica has become the cockpit of Italian art-criticism, but believes, and assures us, that "the whole of the upper part of the *Chiesa Superiore* is painted by Cimabue; the whole of the lower part by Giotto, except the Crucifixion in the left transept, which is also by Cimabue."

This Crucifixion does certainly arrest and hold the attention. There is a barbaric power, a strange and moving emotion in those huge groups of thickset ungainly ghosts, in whose gestures there seem to be expressed an ineffectual passion and violence for which neither Byzantine nor Roman art had at all prepared the medieval mind. The rigidly symmetrical and coldly balanced arrangement of the Byzantines is altogether ignored by this rude ancestor of Tintoretto; he is like a new force springing suddenly from the earth. The uncouth and savage aspect of this painting is accentuated by





THE CHURCH

1000-1100 AD. Church of the Holy Spirit, Constantinople, Turkey



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

the blackening of all the lights, which induces in the beholder much the same sensation as he experiences when he looks at a photographic negative.\* Indeed, before the portentous mass of the design of this Crucifixion, we must confess at once that we are in the presence of a new spirit. It is ugly, but it is alive. Tradition, on the lips of Padre Lorenzo, ascribes it to Cimabue, and though Cimabue is little more than a name I am not prepared to deny the traditional authorship. Whoever was its creator, this Crucifixion, with S. Francis introduced so conspicuously at the foot of the cross, is a landmark, as it were, in the development of Italian painting. There we see an abrupt intrusion of a new, crude native energy into the field of religious art, which, until the beginning of the thirteenth century, had been dominated by the Mosaicists of Byzantium. The thirteenth century saw the struggle between the lifeless elegance of Byzantine art, depending for its appeal almost entirely upon the cold material splendour of its blue and purple and gold; upon its crowds of abstract figures, mere symbols indeed, remote and austere of aspect, and the native Italian genius, meagre as yet in its resources but throbbing with exuberant life. To this new life then, the Franciscan movement naturally turned, when almost immediately after the death of S. Francis, Frate Elias enlisted the best energies of the time to glorify with all the riches and luxury of art the tomb and the memory of the poorest man that ever lived.

The personality of S. Francis, the story of his life, and his glorification, thus entered into the field of art as at once both a new subject and a new element—a great and stimulating theme whose untold possibilities of beauty and

\* This blackening of the lights seems to indicate the use of white lead in the light pigments, either as retouches in secco or as mixed with the lime white; a disastrous technical innovation. A little peroxide of hydrogen might be used here with advantage, as also in that upper fresco, high on the left wall, in which a marriage banquet is spread on a black cloth. It was, Padre Lorenzo tells me, a habit of the Jews to use a black cloth at their wedding banquets. Nevertheless, peroxide of hydrogen would probably bleach the cloth to a tolerable Christian whiteness, and restore certain of the towers and buildings in the central vaulting which are now quite black to their pristine blitheness of hue.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

romance evoked the bravest efforts of the early painters of Italy. Next only to the presentment of Jesus and His Mother, the figure of S. Francis became the most popular and the most frequently painted. An ever-expanding interest in the wonderful story of his life made it the focus of every form of artistic endeavour, for not plastic art alone, but Italian poetry and drama alike trace their origin from him or his time. His songs were still in the air when from another part of Umbria a voice less sweet perhaps than that of Francis, but more racy certainly, was echoing among the hills. Jacopone da Todi, the wandering ballad-singer, the *improvisatore* who had flung aside all earthly encumbrances, passed along the highways and byways of Umbria intoxicated with the joy of his newly-found freedom. Mystic and madman, poet and actor, he sang his wild new songs, or with vehement, unrestrained gesture acted his dialogues. His dialogue between St Francis and the Lady Poverty first brings the figure of St Francis upon the scenes of the Italian Drama. Author and actor of his own primitive plays, Jacopone assumed each character in turn: his stage was the roadside or the open Piazza.

Something of this dramatic and rhythmical beauty may be found, perhaps, in those twenty-eight large panels—like the verses of a canticle—which, illustrating the life of St Francis, form the lower band of the decoration of the nave in the Upper Church of S. Francesco. They compose a narrative setting forth the legends gathered up by Thomas of Celano and S. Bonaventura, and each as it were is a scene in a play, or, as I have said, the verse of a canticle. From left to right the painted actors enter upon the narrow stage before the ill-designed and crudely-painted scene which falls behind them like a crumpled drop-curtain. But before considering the story in detail let us try to realize the problem that presented itself to the artist who was called upon to decorate the nave with a series of paintings from the Saint's life.

The general idea of these panels would seem to have been suggested by those early pictures by Giunta Pisano, Margaritone and Berlinghieri, where the image of the Saint is

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

surrounded by little pictures in compartments, in each of which is represented a scene from his life. The scheme adopted here may be regarded as a development of that idea.\* It divides the available wall space into twenty-eight panels, the symmetrical distribution of which is naturally achieved by placing fourteen to the right and fourteen to the left of the great doors. Considered as a decorative arrangement, therefore, we have a double set of frescoes, opening with the famous picture of "The Thirsty Man" on the right, and the "Sermon to the Birds" on the left and advancing along both walls of the nave from the great doors to the high altar. Thus the starting point, from the point of view of the decorative value of these paintings to the Church does not coincide with the beginning of the story, which is developed not in a double but in a single sequence beginning on the wall at the epistle side of the high altar and ending in the same place on the Gospel side. The situation must have presented itself in just this fashion to Giotto, when having undertaken the task of decorating his portion of the bare walls, he began the work himself by painting the two frescoes, decoratively the first of the series, "The Thirsty Man" and "Sermon to the Birds," on either side of the great doors; while having explained his scheme to his assistants, he allotted to each some portion of the work.

The decorative scheme being well understood we proceed to follow the narrative.

The first scene in the story of S. Francis unfolds itself in

\* This seems likely enough at first sight, but the progressive representation, a narrative in plastic art, was as old as the Parthenon and older—as old as Egypt. The Romans carried it to a wonderful perfection, e.g., in the Column of Trajan, where the continuous episode told as it were in chapter after chapter, realistically, as an historian might tell it, is really a new thing. The sincere insistence upon mere facts there seen reappears in these frescoes at Assisi—the fact of the nakedness of S. Francis, of the anger of his father, of his wounds, and so forth. We do not find mere realistic details of this sort in the frieze of the Parthenon. But the point is that the continuous episode was a Roman idea, only hitherto worked out in Rome. We meet it in the third century at Sta Maria Maggiore, complicated, however, by a symbolism foreign to Roman work. It appears, perhaps for the first time after the classical age, in all its simplicity and realism here in S. Francesco.



## *Assisi of St Francis*

the Piazza of Assisi, with its diminutive symbolical representation of the Temple of Minerva in the background. The sky is crudely repainted with the same dark-blue which we find everywhere in the Upper as in the Lower Church, and which the "restorer" has used *senza risparmio* with disastrous results.

(i) "A certain man of Assisi, a simpleton as is believed, but taught by God, whensoever he met Francis going through the city would doff his cloak and spread the garment before his feet, declaring that Francis was worthy of all honour as one that should ere long do mighty deeds, and was on this account to be splendidly honoured by all the faithful" (S. Bonaventura, *Legenda Major*. Cap. i, par. i. Temple Classics trs).

This scene, so innocent of every quality of art is yet an admirable dramatic conception. It lives, if at all, by virtue of one of the most sustaining characteristics of Italian art, the quality of truthful and expressive gesture. Beyond all other Europeans, the Italians are a gesticulating people; with them gesture is so essential an accompaniment of speech as almost to be a language in itself. This dramatic quality of the race has been seized by Giotto, and its expression is perhaps his principal gift to the art of his country, certainly it is the quality which he most successfully communicates to his disciples. Dignity of mass he may have learnt from Rome, the sweep and rhythm of the lines of his draperies from the Gothic sculptors, but this absolute rightness of dramatic gesture is an unfailing instinct of his own which he was able to communicate, and it gives a spark of vitality to even the feeblest works of his school. In the scene before us, as we might expect, the puny mannikins in their red, yellow, blue or green cloaks have this much of life at least that they can express themselves unmistakably by gesture.

(ii) "Now when Francis was made whole of his sickness, and had made ready for himself in his wonted fashion meet apparel, he met a certain soldier of noble birth, but poor and ill clad; whereupon, compassion-



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

ating his poverty with a kindly impulse, he forthwith did off his garments and put them on him, thus in one act fulfilling a two-fold ministry of kindness, inasmuch as he both covered the shame of a noble knight and relieved the destitution of a poor man" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. i, par. 2).

The composition here is a variant of the traditional one in which we see S. Martin dividing his cloak with the beggar. The painter of this panel seems a degree or two less competent than the feeble executant of the first. It is the work of a craftsman who has but poorly interpreted the design of his master. The somewhat pleasant pastel-like colour of the light blue sky is purely accidental, the result of scraping and dust. Following the example of the earlier miniature painters the artist has cut away the foreground as though to show a section of the earth.

(iii) "Now in the night following, when he had yielded himself to sleep, the divine mercy showed him a fair and great palace together with military accoutrements adorned with the sign of the Cross of Christ; thus setting forth unto him that the mercy he had shown unto the poor soldier for the love of the Most High King was to be recompensed by this peerless reward. Accordingly, when he inquired whose were these things, answer was made him by a divine declaration that they all were his own, and his soldiers" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. i, par. 3).

In this composition, perhaps by the same hand as the second, we see Christ Himself who points to the Palace and explains the vision. This palace is of the traditional Byzantine form with Atrium and Loggia. The fashion of representing a figure lying down, as if it were cut out of a board and made to stand upon its edge, is a debased survival of what was once a beautiful contrivance of the Greeks for exhibiting the recumbent figure. In a matter of this sort the followers of Giotto never dreamed of looking to Nature for guidance; enslaved by the conventions of such modes of painting as they had mastered, they failed to produce any

## *Assisi of St Francis*

adequate representation of that appearance which we call truth.

(iv) "On a certain day when Francis had gone forth to meditate in the fields, he was walking nigh the Church of S. Damiano, which, from its exceeding great age, was threatening to fall, and at the prompting of the Spirit went within to pray. Prostrating himself before an Image of the Crucified he was filled with no small consolation of spirit as he prayed. And as with eyes full of tears he gazed upon the Lord's Cross, he heard with his bodily ears a voice proceeding from that Cross saying thrice, 'Francis, go and repair My House which thou seest is falling utterly into ruin'" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. ii, par. 1).

In this ruined oratory Francis kneels before a twelfth century processional Crucifix in the apse behind the Altar. Puccio Capanna is perhaps the painter of this panel.

(v) "Then this father according to the flesh was fain to take Francis this son of Grace, now stripped of his wealth, before the Bishop of the city, that into his hands he might resign his claims unto his father's inheritance and render up all that had been his. This that true lover of poverty showed himself right ready to do, and coming into the Bishop's presence he brooked no delays, he was kept back of none, tarried for no speech, nor spake himself, but at once did off all his garments and restored them unto his father. Then was the man of God seen to have a hair-shirt next his skin under his rich apparel. Yea, more, as one drunk with wondrous fervour of spirit, he threw aside even his breeches, and stood up naked in the presence of all, saying unto his father: 'Hitherto I have called thee my father on earth, but henceforth I can confidently say "Our Father which art in Heaven" with whom I have laid up my whole treasure and on whom I have set my whole trust and hope.' The Bishop, seeing this, and marvelling at such exceeding fervour in the man of God, rose forthwith and weeping

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

put his arms around him; then, devout and kindly man as he was, he covered him with the cloak where-with he was clad, bidding his servants give him something to clothe his limbs" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. ii, par. 4).

This scene is one of the most dramatic of the series, though it is deplorably rendered. The colouring of the background is more than usually unpleasant, while the red house and the bluish green sky produce an almost painful effect. The artist seems to fail even in the matter of gesture. Here is the tragedy of Bernardone who sees the labour of his life, all his hopes and aspirations brought to nothing as the Bishop covers his son's nakedness.

(vi) "For in a dream he (the Pope) saw, as he told, the Lateran Basilica about to fall, when a little poor man of mean stature and humble aspect propped it with his own back and thus saved it from falling" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. iii, par. 10).

The Pope's bed chamber and the arrangement of the figures in this fresco are derived from the mosaic of Filippo Rusiti in S. Maria Maggiore at Rome. As in the preceding fresco here again we find an unpleasant juxtaposition of violent reds, yellows and greens.

(vii) "He sanctioned the Order and gave him a command to preach repentance, and made all the lay Brethren that had accompanied the servant of God wear narrow tonsures that they might preach the word of God without hindrance" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. iii, par. 10).\*

This fresco is like the work of Rusiti and has much in common with his *Doctors of the Church*, in the last compartment of the roof of the nave here. The architecture shows a

\* This fresco generally called *The Approval of the Order*, by Innocent III, is by more recent critics sometimes regarded as *The Confirmation of the Rule* by Honorius in 1221. The position it occupies, however, in this series would suggest the earlier event. Moreover, Bonaventura nowhere describes *The Confirmation of the Rule* but only the *Approval of the Order*, which he describes as a direct result of the vision of the falling Church.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

somewhat nicer sense of proportion, and a better notion of perspective such as may be seen again in the fresco above that of *The Thirsty Man*. Very similar in its debased way is the next picture, *S. Francis in the Chariot of Fire*.

(viii) "While the man devoted unto God was passing the night, after his wonted manner, in a hut within the Canons' garden, praying unto God and absent in the body from his sons—lo! about midnight, while some of the Brethren were taking rest, others keeping vigil in prayer, a chariot of fire of marvellous brightness, entering by the door of the house, turned thrice hither and thither through the dwelling; and over the chariot a shining ball of fire rested, in appearance like unto the sun, making the night radiant. The watchful Brethren were astounded" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. iv, par. 4).

Another visionary scene follows, probably from the same hand.

(ix) "In the company of the man of God and together with him he (Frate Leone) had been praying with fervour of spirit in a certain deserted church, when, falling into an ecstasy, he beheld among many seats in heaven one that was more honourable than the rest adorned with precious stones and shining with utmost splendour. Marvelling within himself at the splendour of this exalted throne, he began to consider with anxious thought who should be deemed worthy to sit therein. Then, as he considered, he heard a voice saying unto him: 'This seat pertained unto one of the fallen angels and is now kept for the humble Francis'" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. vi, par. 6).

The tenth panel is a scene of truly diabolical confusion.

(x) "It befell once, that he (Francis) came unto Arezzo at a time when the whole city was shaken by a civil war that threatened its speedy ruin. As he was lodging in the outskirts of the city, he beheld the demon exulting above it, and inflaming the angry citizens unto mutual slaughter. Then, that he might put to flight those powers of the air that were stirring up the strife, he sent for-

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

ward as his herald, Friar Silvester, a man of dovelike simplicity, saying: 'Go out before the city gate, and, on behalf of God Almighty, command the demons by the power of obedience to depart with all speed'" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, par. 9).

The eleventh panel, *S. Francis before the Soldan*, is a wretched travesty of Giotto's masterpiece at Sta Croce in Florence. It seems hardly credible that Giotto, at any period of his life, could have countenanced such a caricature of his design. This and some of the other frescoes attributed to him here were probably painted long after he had left Assisi.

(xi) "Thenthe servant of Christ taught by the heavenly council said: 'If thou, together with thy people, wilt be converted unto Christ, for the love of Him I will right gladly tarry among you. But if thou art hesitating whether to give up the law of Mahomet for the faith of Christ, do thou command that a great fire be kindled, and I will enter the fire with thy priests, that even thus thou mayest learn which faith is the surer and holier and most worthy of being held.' Unto whom the Soldan made answer: 'I do not believe that any of my priests would beready to expose himself unto the fire in defence of his faith, or to undergo any sort of torture.' For he had seen that, so soon as mention of this was made, one of his priests, an aged man, and one in authority, had fled from his presence" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.* cap ix, par. 8).

In the twelfth panel we see S. Francis in ecstasy.

(xii) "There he was beheld praying by night, his hands stretched out after the manner of a Cross, his whole body uplifted from the earth, and wrapt in a shining cloud as though the wondrous illumination of the body were a witness unto the wondrous enlightenment of his mind" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. x, par. 4).

In the thirteenth panel we have one of the most interesting pictures of the whole series. It tells us more of the spirit and genius of S. Francis than any of the others.



## *Assisi of St Francis*

(xiii) "Now three years before his death it befell that he was minded, at the town of Greccio, to celebrate the memory of the birth of the Child Jesus with all the added solemnity that he might, for the kindling of devotion. That this might not seem an innovation he sought and obtained license from the Supreme Pontiff and then made ready a manger and bade hay together with an ox and an ass to be brought unto the spot. The Brethren were called together, the folk assembled, the wood echoed with their voices and that august night was made radiant and solemn with many lights and with tuneful and solemn praises. The man of God, filled with tender love, stood before the manger bathed in tears, and overflowing with joy. Solemn Masses were celebrated over the manger, Francis the Levite of Christ chanting the Holy Gospel. Then he preached unto the folk standing round of the Birth of the King in poverty, calling Him, when he wished to name Him, the Child of Bethlehem, by reason of his tender love for Him" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. x, par. 7).

By his institution of the Feast at Greccio, Francis gave to Italian art an inexhaustible theme. The dramatic impulse, which everywhere in Umbria was seeking expression, took its most beautiful form on that Christmas morning in the Church at Greccio when S. Francis brought together the ox and the ass and the manger in which Messer John of Greccio declared that he beheld a little child asleep. It is an anticipation of the Miracle plays that we see here, those *Sacre Rappresentazioni* from which the drama is derived. This fresco although not carried out by Giotto betrays his master mind in its more complicated arrangement and design; as well as in the vigour and expression given to the *dramatis personæ*. In many respects it resembles the panel of the *Death of S. Francis* on the opposite wall. An interesting detail is the crucifix beside the pulpit. It seems to be a back view of that shown in the *Incredulity of Girolamo*. The work here is of a higher order than in any panel we have yet discussed in spite of the repainted blue sky.



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

Turning now to the fourteenth panel we come at last to a picture which may be seriously considered as Giotto's handiwork.

(xiv) The panel before us represents the incident which befell on the way to Monte La Verna when having borrowed the ass of a poor peasant, the way being difficult and the weather sultry, the man suffering from a great thirst began to cry out vehemently and to say that unless he might drink he would die. S. Francis leaping from the ass kneeled down and prayed to God. Then turning to the peasant, "Hasten to that rock," said he, "and thou shalt find a living water which in pity Christ hath sent thee from the stone to drink."

Hitherto we have followed S. Bonaventura almost chapter by chapter, but this scene only occurs in the Lesser Legend: so that here there is a break in the story as well as in the manner and execution of the work. Save for the blue sky, which has been repainted, the picture is almost a monochrome, and in this respect also, unlike the other works of the series except its pendant, the *Sermon to the Birds*. In the hideous landscape there is no attempt to indicate the scorching heat or the dazzling light of midday. Giotto has put his whole mind upon the pantomimic gesture of the thirsty man. That figure is without precedent in Missal or Mosaic. It became at once famous as an amusing invention and it owes its popularity to its genial humour, and to the fact that its quality of expressive gesture was just what Giotto's contemporaries most enjoyed in his painting. We find there too, as in the *Sermon to the Birds* a freshness of conception, a largeness of design and a breadth of treatment which set these two works apart from every other fresco in the Upper Church. The figures are on a larger scale, there is a noble simplicity of line and mass, a kind of amplitude of aspect we do not find anywhere else in the basilica. And then the figures are nicely scaled to the size and proportions of the building. These two panels are the only two in the whole of the Upper Church which observe these elementary considerations of decorative propriety;

## *Assisi of St Francis*

the rocky landscape of Monte La Verna however, has been thrust into undue prominence by the repainting of the sky, the lightness and flatness of the picture being thus destroyed.

(xv) "When he drew nigh unto Bevagna he came unto a spot wherein a great multitude of birds of divers species were gathered together. When the holy man of God perceived them he ran with all speed unto the place and greeted them as if they shared in human understanding. They on their part all awaited him and turned towards him, those that were perched on bushes bending their heads as he drew nigh them, and looking on him in unwonted wise, while he came right among them, and diligently exhorted them all to hear the word of God saying: 'My brothers the birds, much ought ye to praise your Creator who hath clothed you with feathers and given you wings to fly, and hath made over unto you the pure air and careth for you without your taking thought for yourselves.'" (S. Bonaventura *op. cit.*, cap. xii, par. 3).

In this fresco the sky is so scraped, worn, and repainted that we can hardly form an idea of what it may have been. We can see traces of an infinite amount of detail in leafage and plumage that had been done in *secco*, but only traces, for leaf and feather alike have almost vanished. The underpainting in fresco, still partly visible, hints at what a delightful work this must have been when it was fresh and new and all a-flutter with life as Giotto left it—an example and a marvel to which his hopelessly incompetent followers could never attain. Here in these two panels to the right and left of the great doors Giotto has left his mark; for my part I see no trace of it elsewhere at Assisi.

(xvi) "... A certain knight with humble devoutness and great importunity invited him to dine with him. He came accordingly into the house of the knight, and the whole household rejoiced over the coming of their poor guest. Before they partook of the meal, Francis, as he was wont, stood with eyes uplifted to heaven, with

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

a devout mind, offering unto God prayers and praises. His prayers ended, he called aside the kindly host in familiar wise and thus addressed him: 'Lo, my brother and host, yielding unto thine importunity I have come into thy house to eat. Do thou now yield speedily unto my exhortations, forasmuch as thou shalt eat not here, but elsewhere. Confess now thy sins, nor let ought abide in thee that thou dost not lay bare in sincere confession. The Lord will reward thee this day for that thou hast received the poor with such devoutness.' . . . At length they sat down to talk, and while the rest were beginning to eat, the host on a sudden gave up the ghost, carried off by a sudden death according unto the word of the man of God . . ." (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. xi, par. 4).

In this dramatic scene, the group of women clustering about the dying knight recalls similar groups in scenes of the Crucifixion. The figure of Francis is an adaptation from the preceding panel, but we feel that it loses at once in the process.

(xvii) "When he was about to preach in the presence of the Pope and the Cardinals, at the suggestion of the Lord Bishop of Ostia he had committed unto memory a certain carefully prepared sermon, and standing in the midst to set forth the word of edification, found that he had so utterly forgotten it all as that he knew not how to speak a word thereof. When with fruitful humility he had confessed this, he set himself to invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit, and forthwith began to put forth words so mighty in effect, and of such wondrous power to move the minds of those illustrious men unto repentance, as that it was manifestly seen that it was not himself that spake, but the Spirit of the Lord" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. xii, par. 7).

Here the process of adaptation continues, and the figure of Francis lapses still further from the model set in the fresco of the Birds.

The next scene is one of the poorest of the series.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

(xviii) "In what wise Francis showed himself present unto them that were absent, by the working of the divine power, is clearly apparent from what hath been afore related if we recall unto mind how in his absence he appeared unto the Brethren at the Chapter of Arles, showing himself with arms outstretched after the likeness of a Cross" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. xi, par. 14).

The next panel is an almost effaced representation of the miracle of the stigmata.

(xix) "... On a certain morning about the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross while he was praying on the side of the mountain he beheld a Seraph having six wings, flaming and resplendent, coming down from the heights of heaven. When in his flight most swift he had reached the space of air nigh the man of God there appeared betwixt the wings the figure of a Man crucified, having his hands and feet stretched forth in the shape of a Cross and fastened unto the Cross. Two wings were raised above His head, twain were spread forth to fly, while twain hid his whole body. Beholding this, Francis was mightily astonished, and joy, mingled with sorrow, filled his heart" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. xiii, par. 3).

The various versions of this theme are obviously all derived from a lost original by Giotto, but if Giotto's work has disappeared we must be grateful that Van Eyck took up the mystic story and found in it the motive for one of the most precious little pictures in the world.

(xx) "At length when all the mysteries had been fulfilled in him and his most holy spirit was freed from the flesh, and absorbed into the boundless depth of the divine glory, the blessed man fell on sleep in the Lord. One of his brethren and disciples saw that blessed soul, under the likeness of a star exceeding bright borne on a dazzling cloudlet over many waters, mounting in a straight curve unto heaven..." (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. xiv, par. 6).

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

This panel shows us a crowded and animated scene. The brethren are assembled about the body. One holds his aching head between his hands, another examines the wounded part of the Saint, another the right hand, while a fourth looks up into the opening heaven to search out, if it may be, the course of that star which has taken its place there in the stead of Lucifer, star of the morning as it was written. But it is S. Francis himself that we see here not as the soul was traditionally represented in the form of a child, but full grown as in his prime.

(xxi) "A Friar named Augustine, who was then minister of the brethren in Terra di Lavora, an holy and upright man having come unto his last hour, and some time previously having lost the powers of speech, in the hearing of them that stood by did on a sudden cry out and say: 'Tarry for me, Father! tarry for me, lo even now I am coming with thee.' When the Friars asked and marvelled much unto whom he thus boldly spake, he made answer: 'Did ye not see one Father Francis, who goeth unto heaven?' and forthwith his holy soul departing from his body, followed the most holy Father" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. xiv, par. 6).

This fresco should be compared with that of the same subject at Sta Croce, which is far simpler, perhaps because the space to be filled better suits such a composition.

In the following scene—the Incredulity of Girolamo—we have one of the many parallels with the life of Christ.

(xxii) "Very many of the citizens of Assisi were admitted to behold and to kiss those sacred stigmata. Now one among them, a learned man and wise knight, Jerome byname, a man illustrious and renowned, having had doubts concerning these sacred tokens, and having been an unbeliever like Thomas, did very eagerly and boldly, in the presence of the brethren and of the other citizens, move the nails and touch the hands and feet and side of the Saint with his hands; and then it befell that while touching those authentic marks of the wounds of Christ he cut away every wound of unbelief from his



## *Assisi of St Francis*

own heart and the hearts of all" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. xv, par. 4).

This fresco may have been painted long after Giotto's time. It looks as though a great deal of the original *intonaco* had been destroyed and then replaced by the work of different hands at a later period. It is indeed a most puzzling *pasticcio* of different styles, various artists and diverse periods.

(xxiii) "When morning was come, the crowds that had come together, carrying branches of trees and many wax lights, brought the holy body unto the city of Assisi with hymns and chants. Moreover they passed by the church of S. Damiano where at that time the noble Virgin Clare, now glorified in heaven above, cloistered with her sisters; and there for a space they stayed and set down the holy body adorned with those heavenly hearts, that it might be seen and embraced by those holy virgins" (S. Bonaventura, *op. cit.*, cap. xv, par. 5).

The general lines of the composition are wonderfully expressive, and point to an original design by Giotto very feebly carried out, and, in its present state, quite hideous in colour.

There follows the almost obliterated "Canonization," in which there is no trace of Giotto; while the last three panels are by the author of the Sta Cecilia altar-piece in the Uffizi Gallery, and are the feeblest and decoratively the least efficient of the whole series: they recount the stories of the Oriental who having refused to listen to S. Francis is suddenly healed of the wounds he got from some robbers; of the old woman who, dying in mortal sin, was resurrected by the prayers of S. Francis that she might confess; and of a Bishop who, being accused of heresy unjustly, is released from prison by the prayers of the saint.

Such are the frescoes in the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi, and they are of such absorbing interest that one is quite likely to leave the church without noticing the superb *intarsia* of the choir stalls, by far the noblest work of art in the building. These masterpieces of *intarsiatura* are by Domenico di S. Severino. They represent the early com-





THE VIRGIN ENTHRONED WITH SAINTS

*After the tempera panel by Luca Signorelli in the Duomo at Perugia*



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

panions of S. Francis, and surely constitute the most splendid series of imaginary portraits in the world. Several of the earlier ones in the left transept can be likened to nothing less than Rembrandt's finest portraits. We are not accustomed to think of *intarsia* as capable of yielding such noble results in figure work, although there are many delightful instances of its successful employment in architectural perspectives. But the character and colour which S. Severino has been able to obtain from various shapes and hues of wood is delightful beyond all praise.

The history of painting in Italy, from the time when in the thirteenth century it began to be Italian painting endeavouring to give expression to a newly evolved sense of beauty, shows a gradual progress from a two-dimension Art upon a gold ground, to a three-dimension Art from which the use of gold is excluded.

This does not imply that the painters of the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries were by any means unconscious of the third dimension; indeed, they are, with the best intentions, continually endeavouring to render it, at least to indicate or symbolize it, by a conventional scheme of shading. Only very gradually did they come to realize that a surface of gold, whether burnished or matt, however splendid for decorative purposes and even absolutely essential to the effective decoration of dark crypts and dimly lit chapels, is an annihilator of space. A surface of gold so reflects the light that it can never form a part of any consistent scheme of chiaroscuro or colour, and the greatest painters, when introducing golden brocades or other gilded objects into their pictures, have preferred to represent them by the use of ochre rather than to use the gold itself. Whether at a distance of a few feet or several miles away, gold has practically the same effect upon the eye—it destroys the illusion of space by bringing all the figures silhouetted against it into the same plane, so that even when used in spots, or in ornament as Pinturicchio uses it, or in the hands of such a master of modelling as Signorelli, it destroys ærial perspective. On the other hand, by way of compensation, gold is also the universal harmonizer. The most violently contrasted colours, such as

## *Assisi of St Francis*

ultramarine and vermilion, are subdued by the power of gold, and this is perhaps why all old pictures on gold grounds are so pleasant to look upon, and why they take their place upon a wall when even the greatest masterpieces of painting may fail to fulfil any decorative purpose. One may not hang even a Titian upon the same wall as a *fondo d'oro*, for it will appear at a disadvantage, and we may say therefore that the two-dimension artist with his gold ground is to be preferred to the great painter when it is a question of decorating dimly-lit interiors, such as the central vault and the transept of the Lower Church at Assisi.

Gold, because of its quality of reflecting a mellow light; beautiful in itself because it is gold, and because it tends to bring every painted surface with which it is associated into a pattern on a definitely established plane—must play a very important part in any scheme of architectural decoration where there is a limited supply of light.

In the Upper Church at Assisi, where the conditions of lighting are so favourable as to suggest a treatment without the use of gold; where, indeed, gold would be unpleasantly glaring if used in any considerable quantity—the failure of the painters of the Franciscan cycle to decorate the walls of the nave becomes plainly manifest.\*

Let us now see how far such a principle as I have stated, viz.—that gold should play an important, if not a leading

\* It is the painters on gold grounds, upon gilded panels, who have given Tuscany her most precious altar-pieces, and such treasures as we see in the corridor of the Uffizi, and the Museo Civico at Siena. The Sienese, indeed, seem most at home with this form of Art. Their easy, gay "French" temperament, their Japanese-like feeling for pattern and variety of surface, and their delight in sinuosity of line and flatness of mass, give them the mastery here. They might for ever have been content to produce beautiful flower-like things; but later on it came about that the more strenuous Florentines, in their insatiable love of novelty, put more stress into the form than it could bear, and finally destroyed it altogether in bringing about the modern conception of painting.

Piero della Francesca's altar-piece in the gallery at Perugia, in which he gives us such a pathetic conception of St Francis, is almost the last word of the *fondo d'oro*.

Some of the most fascinating works in all Art belong to the period when certain of the fifteenth century painters still hark back to the gold ground formula, and overlay their works with a pattern of gold, as if reluctant to abandon so assured a means of splendour of effect. Signorelli's great altar-



SS. VINCENT, CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA, AND NICHOLAS  
*(After the tempera panel by Antoniazio Romano (?) [lo Sfagna (?) ?] in  
 the Church of S. Francesco at Montefalco)*





## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

part, in the decoration of dimly-lit interiors—has been applied and worked out in the cavernous Lower Church at Assisi. At first, as we enter the dark blue vault, we see no hint of gold, but it will not be long before we discover that the great masses of blue, though producing an undeniably picturesque effect—indeed, one may say a theatrical effect—have little to do with the original scheme of decoration.

The key to the scheme will be found in looking up at the central vault over the altar where are the famous Allegories of the Franciscan Virtues.

The figures in the Allegories in the central vault of the Lower Church have been described as floating upon the “dusky blue” of the vault.\* These rosy-robed figures and pale pink towers do indeed shoot up towards the centre, or rather they are uncomfortably squeezed into the spaces between the ribs of the vaulting, but they do not float upon a “dusky blue” ground. The ground upon which they float is old gold with the red bole showing through. Clearly then, the vault was once a blaze of burnished gold. In the compart-

piece of the Virgin Enthroned, in the winter choir of the Duomo at Perugia, is a magnificent example of this treatment. Benozzo Gozzoli is a painter who gains immeasurably by adopting this method. His little altar-piece in the Pinacoteca at Terni is a marvel in this respect. It is one of his early works, but it remains his masterpiece though there is almost as much of Fra Angelico in it as of Gozzoli. There is no landscape, and therefore he is not betrayed into any of those indiscretions that so often mar his work. Gozzoli, like many other artists, owes his popularity largely to his indiscretions, but nevertheless, when a considerable quantity of silky golden brocade is involved in his design, he is altogether fascinating. I have inserted a reproduction of a fine work by Antoniazzo Romano from the Church of S. Francis at Montefalco which was shown last year at Perugia, as demonstrating how freely and with what splendid effect the gold ground was used by some of the late fifteenth century painters.

Antoniazzo, who is known to have assisted Melozzo da Forlì in the Vatican Library, in the days of Sixtus IV, was an unpretentious painter who signs and dates a copy of an antique Byzantine painting for the Cathedral Church of San Clemente at Velletri. In the picture of St Vincent, St Catherine of Alexandria (erroneously inscribed S. Illuminata) and St Nicholas, we seem to behold, in effect, three fine polychrome statues standing against a splendid mass of gold.

\* “Upon the dusky blue of the vault float on all sides figures robed in golden rose and greenish umbrous white, while pale pink towers shoot up towards the centre, etc.”

## *Assisi of St Francis*

ments of the transept the gold ground, once so beautifully symbolizing the sky, is now heavily overlaid with that modern chemical product known as "French Ultramarine." This pigment has been so liberally employed in "restoration" that it is now the prevailing colour of the Lower Church. There is so much of it, that the writer I have quoted may perhaps be excused for seeing blue in the one place where it is not visible.

These Allegories have formed the subject of much rhapsodical writing, and have been relegated by every "authority" in turn to one period or another of Giotto's career; but grateful as we must be, and we cannot be too grateful to modern critics, it must be confessed that we find them weltering as hopelessly as their less scientific predecessors in the bog of the Giotteschi.

Thrown back entirely upon internal evidence and characteristics of style, they find no solid ground to walk upon in this region. The attempt, therefore, to individualize such work as that of these ill-designed Allegories, seems as vain and absurd as to claim for them any rare merit or beauty. Perhaps, however, they bring us as near to the medieval mind as anything we can see in the Church, for the people of the Middle Ages had a strong predilection for abstract ideas and the artistic expression of them naturally took a symbolical or allegorical form. People came to take pleasure in these forms for their own sake, and for the mystery and remoteness of the ideas thus symbolized; they took delight in the fanciful vesture given to dry dogmatic propositions. Even in our own times we have had a curious and wonderfully successful return to this form of Art in the æsthetic movement, which began in the middle of the nineteenth century and had its greatest success in the works of Burne-Jones. It was a conscious, and therefore artificial reversion to medievalism on the part of an artist, who, although vastly more gifted than most of his contemporaries, was baffled by the realities of actual life, and harking back to the youth of the world, expressed his loathing of his own day in such beautiful terms that the world rewarded him with a fortune and a baronetcy.

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

It is popularly supposed that Dante had suggested the theme of these Allegories at Assisi, but there seems little in the puerile ideas out of which they are woven to warrant so august an origin, and nothing but opinion supports the theory that Giotto was other than indirectly responsible for their existence.

In the *Mystical Marriage of S. Francis and Holy Poverty*, groups of standing angels fill the scene to the right and left of the central group where Christ himself bestows upon Francis the Bride, who to the World appears only less terrible than Death. Holy Obedience, an enthroned figure in a Franciscan habit, lays a yoke upon the neck of a friar. Prudence and Humility are on either side. Prudence is represented as double-faced, and holding a mirror and a compass. Behind the nimbus of each virtue its name is plainly written.

In the Allegory of Chastity there are three virtues, Sta. Castita, Sta. Munditia and Sta. Fortitudine, with Love, a horrid imp, flying with harpy feet before the lash of Penitence. He wears a garland upon his head, his eyes are bandaged, and a bandolier of human hearts is slung over his shoulder.

In the Glorification of S. Francis, the Saint appears as though carried in procession under a starry *baldacchino*. He has wide open, staring eyes, and rays of light shine out from his richly gilded robe.

We pass from these overpraised works to the Sieneese works in the north transept. There the Lorenzetti Brothers and their School are represented by a cycle of stories from the Passion of Our Lord, beginning with the *Entrance into Jerusalem*. The golden skies which once formed the setting of these designs, are now replaced by the usual devastating blue. Owing partly to this, the groups in the various scenes appear more cut up and confused than they seemed once, though the Lorenzetti had lost the secret of the solemn masses of Duccio, breaking them up by extravagant and ill considered gesticulations. Still, the original golden backgrounds would have pulled the series together, and lent a kind of decorative unity to these weak and straggling compositions. In *The Entry into Jerusalem* amidst the acclama-

## *Assisi of St Francis*

tions of the crowd, Christ raises His hand in blessing; a man throws his cloak under the ass's feet, while another proposes to follow his example, and boys gather branches of olive. The apostles follow conversing in groups. In the background are the walls and buildings of Jerusalem.

*The Last Supper* is represented as taking place under a curiously designed six-sided canopy, supported by light columns upon which are winged genii with cornucopias. In the kitchen, close at hand, a servant cleans a plate with a cloth, while conversing with a scullion whose hand is on his shoulder. The painter has done this little *genre* scene with some relish, following his real bent, while showing little interest in the solemn story of the Last Supper.

*The Washing of the Disciples' Feet*, *The Flagellation*, *The March to Calvary* are all by the same hand, and show the same lack of interest on the part of the painter. On the balcony, in the *Flagellation*, a woman and child playing with a chained monkey show another clownish endeavour to enliven the work with a touch of *genre*.

The great *Crucifixion* closes the series, and we feel that the Lorenzetti in their works show a sad falling off from their master Duccio. They do little honour to Siena, though to a Sienese, Simone Martini, is reserved the high honour of bringing to the shrine of S. Francis the most precious gift that Art can yield. His is the gift of beauty, and his frescoes in the Chapel of S. Martin are a very complete revelation of that new sense we have learned to recognize as the flowering of Christian sentiment.

But let us turn for a moment to the right transept and the series of stories from the early life of Christ. These frescoes have been given and taken away from every known name amongst the Giotteschi by every critic in turn. They have even been held to be the works of the master himself—his first tentative endeavours, proof of his ripened powers, or his last supreme achievements. The series comprises *The Annunciation*, *Visitation*, *Nativity*, *Adoration of the Magi*, *Presentation in the Temple*, *Flight into Egypt*, *Massacre of the Innocents*, *Dispute in the Temple* and *Return to Nazareth*. In this series we have reached almost the lowest level of the

## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

school. And like the frescoes of the Lorenzetti in the left transept, they have lost their only chance of fulfilling a decorative function by the loss of their gilded ground.

The other three frescoes in this transept represent certain miracles of S. Francis. The figure to the left of a man holding his finger to his chin in the story of the child rescued from the ruins of a house is so much finer than the rest of the work as to suggest the kindly intervention at this point of a much more competent artist. This figure and the two profiles adjoining have some freshness of observation and firmness of execution. The rest of the group is made up of the usual tiresome *clichés* of the school, adaptations or drawings and cartoons that have been used over and over again.

In the Chapel of St Nicholas, or of The Blessed Sacrament we come upon the best piece of Giottesque work to be found at Assisi, in a fairly good state of preservation. These frescoes shew an unusually soft, sweet and delicate manner of modelling the faces in a more definite, if still very imperfectly apprehended plan of Chiaroscuro. The broad treatment of the draperies, and the rhythmical balance of its folds seem to bring us nearer to Giotto than anything else we may see in the Lower Church. The composition of the groups is admirably simple, and the dramatic intention of each story is carried out by unfailing truthfulness of gesture. Yet they are not properly in scale with the architecture of the Chapel, and one feels that the figures in these designs, which here convey a sense of puniness, might have been used with greater propriety on small altar-pieces and *tavolotti*. The artist who of course had never dreamed of such things as binocular glasses, has taken less pains with his work as it recedes from the eye in the upper part of the walls.

Ten of the original fourteen compartments remain; they illustrate the deeds and miracles of the S. Nicholas of Bari. The subjects are as follows: (1) By night he throws gold into the house of an impoverished gentleman with three daughters. (2) He arrives at the church of Mira, and is chosen Bishop by the clergy who, by divine revelation, waited for him at the door of the Sanctuary in the early morning. (3) He is consecrated and enthroned a Bishop.



## *Assisi of St Francis*

(4) He saves a ship from wreck in a storm. (5) He saves from death three innocent men. (6) He forgives the consul who had condemned him. (7) He appears to the Emperor Constantine who had unjustly accused three of his generals of treason. (8) His image is beaten by a Jew. (9) He restores a child strangled by Demons to life. (10) He restores to her family a child who had fallen into the water when filling a golden cup for his altar. For S. Nicholas is the patron of property, and also the patron of thieves, and is especially the liberator and rescuer of children.

Above this arch, on one side, S. Francis presents Cardinal Napoleone Orsini to the Redeemer, and on the other S. Nicholas intercedes for Gian Gaetano Orsini in the habit of a Brother Minor. The whole series is probably the work of one of Giotto's earliest disciples.

In the Chapel of Sta Maria Maddalena we return again to the dreary dullness of the school. The figure of Bishop Tebaldo Pantano represented kneeling before the Magdalen has the interest attaching to an early attempt at portraiture.

Let us now return to Simone Martini, who brings to the shrine of S. Francis more of the Franciscan spirit, more of the delight in the beauty of Nature, than any of the workers who came to Assisi. He brings back to Francis, changed into colour and line and pattern, some of the beauty that had gone forth in song and praise and which blossoms in the almost contemporary *Fioretti*. Simone's work is like a flowery sweet-smelling meadow in spring-time, and may be regarded as the perfect bloom of Sienese Art, or as that strange flower, upon whose petals were written in letters of gold the words "Ave Maria," which filled men with such delight and wonder when it unfolded itself in the garden—so that when they searched for the root of that flower, they found it deep in the ground, wound round the heart of the dead old knight who after a life of sin entered a cloister that he might do penance; and although his hard old head could never remember anything but "Ave Maria," these words were always on his lips and served him for all his prayers.

Simone was born in 1283, and is first known to us by the



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

large fresco in the Public Council Chamber at Siena, painted in 1315, which shows the Virgin and Child enthroned under a *baldacchino*, carried by saints and angels. In a solemn assembly of sacred persons, patriarchs and prophets, woven into a design of golden brocade embroidered with patterns and spangled with flowers, amid a scene of unearthly beauty, the Child standing upon its Mother's knee seems to explain the words upon a scroll *Diligite Justitiam Qui Judicatis Terram*, and to admonish the Wise Men of the Commune to be just and kind. This artless masterpiece is in every way worthy of the lovely city dedicated to the Virgin. It is one of those works in which the artist is sustained entirely by his instinctive sense of beauty, and owes little or nothing to any scientific or constructive principles. His work is a perfect expression of what we to-day call temperament. The long sinuous lines of his draperies are like the curves described by a bird rising and falling against the wind. Not very firmly based upon observation of Nature, this artless two-dimensional Art is in its beauty like a product of Nature itself. To think of Simone is to think of flowers; and his masterpiece—*The Annunciation* in the corridor of the Uffizi, in which he collaborated so harmoniously with Lippo Memmi—is the fairest flower in his garden, as fair and sweet as were the words of Gabriel to the Holy Virgin on that first morning of the world. Never has profound emotion been expressed by more surprising means than in the sweeping curves of that shrinking blue figure, set in the midst of a splendour of lily-white and gold. Save the angels of Fra Angelico, there are none so wrapt in heavenly grace as his holy people; and as though with the light of heaven shining out upon us from their faces, they are amongst the most convincing creations in Italian art. Angelico and Simone are the "court painters" of heaven, and Simone of all those chosen to adorn the sanctuary of S. Francis is the most saint-like and the most Franciscan in spirit. He was perhaps the most active painter of his age. The field of his operations ranged from Naples, where he was employed by Robert of Anjou in 1312, to Avignon, where he worked at the Papal court from about 1335 to 1339. His work in the Lower Church

## *Assisi of St Francis*

at Assisi, in the Chapel of Cardinal Gentile Pantino da Montefiore, is supposed to have been done some time between 1322 and 1326, with the assistance of his brother Donato, the suggested author of the half-length figures in the transept.

The Cardinal Gentile was the Papal Legate to the King of Hungary and was employed by Clement V and Benedict XI in important negotiations. He died at Avignon about 1312, and his body was brought to Assisi. In accordance with his last will and testament two chapels were erected—one dedicated to S. Louis, King of France, the other to S. Martin, the titular Saint of his Cardinalate. This latter is a small and almost square building, with a large window behind the altar. The lower part of the walls is decorated with the usual red and white inlaid marble, the upper part by the frescoes illustrating the life of S. Martin. Above the entrance Cardinal Gentile appears before his patron saint, and on the under surface of the arch are figures of saints.

The first scene in the series is that of S. Martin dividing his cloak with a beggar who is shivering with cold. The second shows the Saint asleep, when in a dream, the Redeemer appears before him dressed in the half of the cloak given to the beggar man. In the third the Emperor Constantine gives S. Martin his sword while an attendant attaches his spurs; the man with a falcon on his wrist and the two musicians form a playful and charming group. The fourth is the most charming composition of the series, and shows the young Saint before the emperor proposing to advance against the barbarians armed only with the sign of the Cross. The fifth scene is the death of S. Hilary of Poitiers. In the sixth S. Martin celebrates Mass in Alberga. The seventh is the miracle of the resurrection of a child in the presence of many Gentiles, who are converted to the faith. In the eighth the Saint assists at the funeral of the Bishop of Tours. The ninth represents the visit of the Saint to the Emperor Valentinian. The tenth is the death of S. Martin. In this Chapel, in what has been left unrestored or has otherwise escaped the ravages of time, and in the ruined Giotto's in the Upper Church may be discovered with patience



S. GIACOMO APOSTOLO

*(After the fresco by Pier Antonio da Foligno in the Cappella dei Pellegrini, Assisi)*



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

and goodwill all that is beautiful in the fresco work of the basilica of S. Francis.

But it is not in S. Francesco alone that one finds beautiful things done for the sake of S. Francis. As you wander up the Via Principe di Napoli, from the great basilica towards the Piazza Grande, you come upon the tiny Cappella dei Pellegrini—a complete little cabinet of frescoes by two masters of the fifteenth century, Matteo da Gualdo and Pier Antonio da Foligno, called Mezzastris. Of that *Ospedale* for Pilgrims, founded in 1431, only this chapel remains, all the rest having been demolished in 1885. But there those two artists—who may be classed with Bonfigli, Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, Niccolò da Foligno and Bernardino di Mariotto, as among the most important painters of that provincial school which drew its inspiration from Fra Angelico, Benozzo Gozzoli and Piero della Francesca—have painted the stories of S. James of Campostella and S. Antony Abbot, and above the altar the Annunciation and Madonna with her little Son.

Hardly anywhere in Umbria shall we have the pleasure of seeing true fresco, by such competent provincial masters as Matteo di Gualdo and Mezzastris, under better conditions than in the Pellegrini Chapel at Assisi. There they are easily seen, the light is good, and the work is in a rare state of preservation. And then to our surprise and delight, there is some *real* ultramarine visible in the second compartment of the left wall under the Loggia, where S. Anthony is distributing alms, and in the skies behind S. Anthony and S. James. The frieze of *Putti* showering flowers upon the faithful worshippers, is an extraordinarily pretty conceit, symbolizing the grace of heaven that falls upon the souls of those whose hearts are ever offered in homage to the Madonna.

A century and a half after Giotto and Duccio, Italian Art seems to have become conscious that it had made a false start, and that the practices of the Giotteschi were in the end hardly less stifling than had been those of the Byzantines and the Mediæval Romans to Giotto. The species of academic sterility latent in Giotto shewed itself more and



## *Assisi of St Francis*

more in the work of his followers, till they ceased to satisfy the more critical taste of the dawning Renaissance. The school never produced a man who was in any way the equal of its founder, and the impulse towards the creation of beauty which had been imparted by S. Francis would have spent itself had not the scientific and constructive intelligence of the fifteenth century, completely freeing itself from Giottesque traditions, given the arts of painting and sculpture the direction which they have ever since followed.

The story of Modern Painting then, really begins when the Florentines, with their perspective and anatomy, have laid the lines along which alone any profitable study of visual phenomena could develop. If the credit of supplying the back-bone to the organism of Italian painting is to be given to any one man, it must surely be to Paolo Uccello, the sleepless student of perspective. Piero della Francesca was his noblest descendant.

In the Pellegrini Chapel, however, it is not so much the influence of Piero that is felt as that of Gozzoli. Benozzo Gozzoli, the pupil of Fra Angelico, was more nearly in touch with the Umbrian temper, and his influence was thus more quickly felt. In the early days Giotto and Simone Martini, and later, Angelico, Gozzoli and Piero della Francesca, walk like gods among the provincial masters, but Gozzoli, above all, seems to have made the deepest impression upon the Umbrians. Having in him more of the ingenuous and child-like nature than Piero or his master Angelico, he was far more readily understood by the kindly, rustic children of Umbria. They especially rejoiced in his landscapes; and at Montefalco, he placed before their delighted eyes such a view of Monte Subasio as must have more than realized all their dreams of what a landscape might be.

Montefalco is a little city on a hill-top some eight miles south and west from Foligno. In what was once the choir of the church of S. Francesco there, desecrated now and used as a gallery of pictures, Benozzo Gozzoli has painted a series of frescoes of the life of S. Francis, in which we may see how the legend has grown since the days of Giotto. S. Francis was a man so like to Christ as to be almost mistaken for





THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

*(After the tempera panel by Bernardino di Mariotto in the Pinacoteca Vanucci at Perugia)*



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

Him; it is therefore certain that he too, like the Prince of Life, was born in a stable. Thus, then, has Benozzo painted it at Montefalco. In the first picture of this exquisite series we see the mother of S. Francis bidden by our Lord as a pilgrim to go to a stable for the birth of her child. There he is born, and while still a child a madman spreads his coat for him to walk on. In the second picture Francis gives his cloak to a poor knight, and dreams of a castle splendid with the banners of the Cross. In the third he is disowned by his father, and the Bishop of Assisi wraps him in his cloak. In the fourth S. Francis meets S. Dominic; and our Lord, angry in heaven, is besought by Madonna to choose these two as new apostles.\* Beneath we have the Pope's vision of S. Francis supporting the falling Lateran; the Confirmation of the Rule; S. Francis sending away the demons from Arezzo; the Sermon to the Birds and the blessing of Montefalco in the person of its bishop Mark; the dinner with the knight of Celano, whose death the Saint predicts. Beneath again we have S. Francis serving as Deacon in the Christmas Mass and instituting the Presepio; later the Soldan employs a woman to tempt him; he walks through the fire; he receives the Stigmata and dies. On the ceiling is S. Francis with a book in which is written, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," and around are certain Franciscan and Dominican saints—SS. Dominic, Rosa of Viterbo, Bernardino of Siena, Catherine of Siena and Anthony of Padua. Beneath these, in a series of *tondi*, are the heads of persons connected with the Franciscan Order. This work, so uninitiated and so boyish, comes far nearer than ever Giotto was able, to realizing the spiritual beauty of the Saint's life. It is true Franciscan work, sweet and debonair.

Benozzo Gozzoli's greatest pupil in Umbria was Niccolò da Foligno, perhaps the most representative man of the school. Born about 1430 in Foligno, that little city of the plain, and living to the end of the century, he was regarded in Umbria as the father of the school. The main endeavour

\* On this fresco of the meeting of S. Francis and S. Dominic, cf. Faloci Pulignani *S. Francesco e S. Dominic* in *Miscellanea Francesca*, vol. IX, p. 13.

## *Assisi of St Francis*

of Niccolò is to make us feel the joys and griefs of Christ, the violent emotions and ecstasies of the Blessed Virgin and of S. Francis. But he thinks of his art mainly as a vehicle for the expression of the sacred drama; he shares the common feeling of the school for the charm of landscape. In S. Rufino in Assisi there is an interesting triptych, with landscape scenes in the predella, charmingly illuminated and much like similar works by Gentile da Fabriano; but it is for his representation of poignant grief that he is most celebrated amongst his countrymen. Vasari tells us of a work of his, now lost, that "the best painting that ever Niccolò wrought was in a chapel of the Duomo of Assisi, where amongst other things there is a Pietà, and two angels holding torches, who weep so bitterly that I judge that no painter, be he never so excellent, could have done better."

Bernardino di Mariotto is another genuine Umbrian who shares all the enthusiasm of Gentile da Fabriano and the early Eugubine School for exuberant ornamentation. He is a designer of patterns, and his conception of a painting is that it should consist entirely of infinitely varied patterns, yet, while carrying out this idea to the last square inch of his *tavola*, he still manages to maintain a Signorellesque grandeur of design. In his curiously wreathed clouds, his garlands of flowers, his heavily brocaded draperies; in the golden *tessereæ* of his backgrounds, his bishops, saints, angels and cherubim; in the hands, feet, faces, plaited locks of hair and curly beards, all divided into section and subsection and handled somewhat heavily;—he gives us a real Umbrian conception of a beautifully stencilled Heaven. It is a place wherein every object is beautiful, that is to say where every object is a complete ornament in itself. All the persons in his drama are ponderously pious, or ponderously humorous, for we cannot be quite sure that his comic effects, such as the figure of the infant S. John in the *Sposalizio di Sta Caterina* at Perugia are altogether undesigned. I think we may suspect him of a kind of rustic humour. His main object, however, is to achieve a rich and elaborate pattern in which all the very various elements of his picture are linked together, and brought into harmony by an intricate





THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN WITH SS. BERNARDINO AND ANTONIO  
*(After the tempera panel by Niccolò di Liberatore da Foligno, called Niccolò Verulo [?], which  
 before 1499 [?] in the Church of S. Niccolò at Foligno.)*





## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

arabesque of gold running across its surface, and reducing everything to a single plane like a stencil on a wall. He is almost as rich a mine of ornament as Crivelli, though without the exquisite fancy or finish of the Venetian master.

Pinturicchio too, that most fortunate of artists, is an admirable designer of festoons, and indulges himself in all manner of finery, showing his real Umbrian taste in this respect. At Spello, we have his masterpiece in the church of S. Andrea. This magnificent picture is a marvel of gilded pattern. S. Lawrence blazing in a splendid vesture of wrought gold, S. Giovanino on the steps of the throne, S. Andrea with the great golden cross, S. Louis of Toulouse with his Bishop's crozier, the Madonna and the Divine Child, each charged with a particular splendour of their own, are all contrived together to form an overpoweringly rich foil to the simple, grey, unadorned figure of S. Francis. In this grand picture Pinturicchio is indeed *un artista molto furbo*, and in that portrait of himself in the Duomo of Spello, in an ornamental arrangement of shelves, brushes and painters' implements charmingly festooned against the wall, we have all that he can give us. And what a charming and playful gift it is! We like him better here, in the heart of his own Umbria, than elsewhere. He shows to better advantage at Spello than in Rome or at Siena, where his theory that decoration is an accumulation of ornaments and bright colours so naïvely exposes itself.

In the group of pictures at Perugia which constitutes the artistic personality known as Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, we seem to see, as in a crystal ball, the more or less distorted images of half a dozen Florentines and several Umbrians. Lorenzo is by nature so lacking in individuality, or so sensitive to external influences that he is instantly impressed by the latest new work, receiving and retaining for a time the stamp of some external quality while unable to assimilate essential things. It is not surprising that little should be known of such a man. As an artist, he shows himself a lively eclectic, light-heartedly appropriating the external qualities of better artists than himself, so that he is spoken of as having a variety of styles. We soon tire of the dull versions of

## *Assisi of St Francis*

various masters which he presents to us in the Sala di Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, in the Pinacoteca at Perugia; but on leaving this collection of *pasticci*, we enter the little room hard-by, where we experience a moment of surprise and delight. Here we find that famous series of the miracles of S. Bernardino of Siena, a set of little pictures of extraordinary piquancy and daintiness, which it is difficult for us to believe can be by the author of the more pretentious works in the larger room.

Fiorenzo, if he be indeed their author, has remembered for a moment the precepts of Piero della Francesca in the matter of perspective, as he did also in the picture which used to hang on the walls of the Porziuncula, and which has been mysteriously removed.\* Perhaps because of this he has been regarded as the pupil of Piero della Francesca, otherwise, he cannot in any way be said to share his master's greatness, or to continue, or to develop, any of his qualities; nor is he to be reproached for this. Piero is of all men the one whose qualities lend themselves least readily to analysis, and are perhaps incommunicable, since they are so intimately a part of the serene temper, the cool intelligence of the man, and of the steady, courageous attitude of his mind.

In considering the painters on gold grounds, we have already noticed in the Altarpiece of the Perugian Gallery that figure of S. Francis by Piero so startling and pathetic in its homely reality. There we come into touch with the most perfectly balanced intelligence that had yet occupied itself with the Art of painting, and we suggest that the Art which grew to such perfection under his hand, demanded for its complete expression the exclusion of golden backgrounds and golden ornaments. Piero is better prepared than any man of his time to make this sacrifice with advantage. He has come to the point where he must have the full play of the three dimensions in which to compose his picture, for his art is based upon perspective, and he is the architect of space. That which, in some of his successors—in Raphael, or Perugino and their endless following—is so

\*This picture is now in the United States.



A MIRACLE OF S. BERNARDINO

*(After the tempera panel by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo (?) in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, Sala XIII, at Perugia)*



## *The Franciscan Legend in Art*

often mere vacuity, is always with Piero a definitely determined quantity of space having a perfectly logical relation to the objects contained in it. The teachings of Paolo Toscanello and Paolo Ucello had fallen upon rich soil, and borne at last the perfect fruit of Florentine painting. Piero is the ultimate product of one of the two lines of investigation which the Florentines applied to the problems of painting, one being perspective, the other anatomy. His "style" is the consequence of the uncompromising application of his method to the problems of representation. He seeks the solution of every difficulty as it arises, in direct reference to natural conditions, rather than by relying upon any traditional procedure. His work is a continuous surprise, and we come upon it for the first time as upon some fair aspect of nature. The first to record and subdue to the purpose of his art such delicate phenomena as the morning mists floating in the folds of the hills, and the reflected images of objects in the water, he has come nearer to success than any one who has ever attempted to paint the life of the open air. His people, bathed in the cool silvery light that falls from the zenith in the early dawn, or in the twilight of a summer day, so naturally occupy their allotted spaces in the landscape that they form part of the scene in which they move.

In all this how immeasurably superior is his work to that of his clever and industrious contemporary Benozzo Gozzoli, delightful man as he is at Montefalco, where, as we have seen, he has painted by far the finest version of the Franciscan legend. But Piero stands equally apart from his contemporaries and from his successors. He has pupils but no followers.

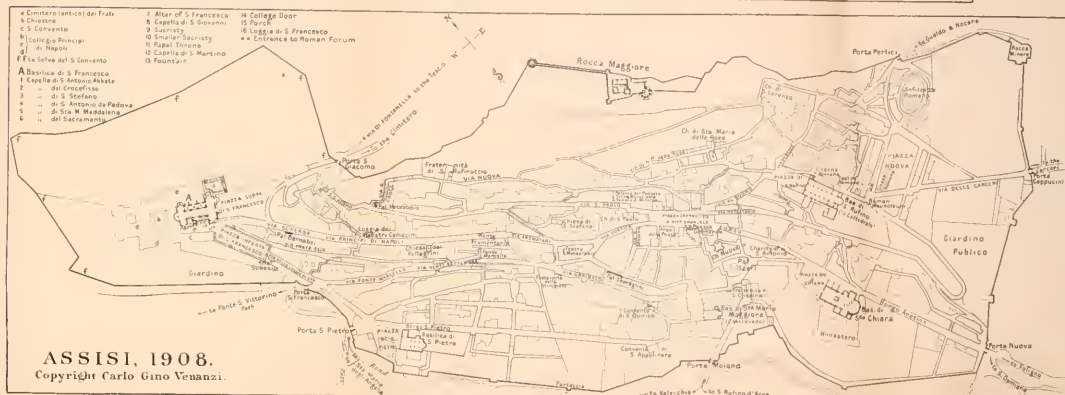
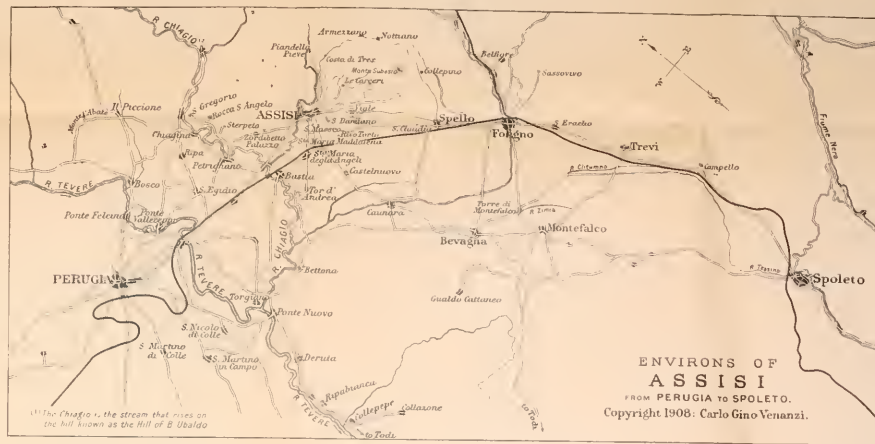
Is it claiming too much for the Umbrian, Piero, to say that he is the greatest of the Florentine painters? I think not, since what he has left us is of more importance than the work of any of his successors. If to-day it were known that by some topsy-turvy process a fresco of Raphael's, say "The Battle of Constantine," lay buried beneath one of Piero's stories of the finding of the True Cross, should we consent to the destruction of the Piero in order to recover the Raphael?

## *Assisi of St Francis*

In his great work in the choir of the Conventual Church of S. Francis at Arezzo, we see the art of fresco painting come at last to perfection. The rude beginnings of that art we have attempted to trace at Assisi, springing as it were from the tomb of S. Francis immediately after his death. For the first two centuries of its life, from its infancy until it reached its complete development, it was nourished and sheltered in the churches of the Franciscans, whether those of the Conventuals or the Observants. Thus the Franciscan movement called Italian Art into existence, and upon the altars and walls of its churches gave it the field in which to expand. The influence of the Franciscan spirit upon it, up to the point at which we leave it, was an overwhelming influence. It was to the early Art of Italy what the sun and the wind and the rain are to the growing flowers. It evokes from the deep religious emotion of the Middle Ages the spirit of Beauty. But with Piero della Francesca we are already in the full stream of the Renaissance, and it would be vain to try to trace the Franciscan influence farther. It soon ceases to be the principal, or even a leading, influence in the awakened life of Italy.







## INDEX

**A**CADEMIES, the Italian, 184,  
185  
Adrian I, Pope, 10  
Agino, Bishop of Assisi, 18  
Agnellus, Brother, English Minister  
Provincial, 114  
Agnes, degli Scefi, St, 88, 90, 94-96,  
99, 109, 155, 156, 204  
—, St, daughter of Stanislas Ottocar,  
154  
Albert of Pisa, Brother, 151, 152, 154  
Albigenses, the, 75  
Albornoz, Cardinal Egidio, 163, 164,  
210, 232  
Alessi, Galeazzo, 183, 185, 224, 230  
Alexander IV, Pope, 158, 219  
— VI, Pope, 178, 179  
Alfonso II, King of Portugal, 118  
Alunno, Niccolò, 230  
Alvernia, see Monte La Verna  
Alviano, 105  
Amatucci, Giulio, 191, 192  
Amelia, Prospero Consacchi di, 157  
Ancona, the March of, 25, 73, 100,  
101, 116, 152  
Andrea da Montefalco, 214  
Andrew of Spello, Brother, 110, 203  
Angelico, Fra Beato, 237, 267, 273,  
275, 276  
Angelo Tancredi, Brother, 80, 128,  
129, 134, 159, 215  
Anthony, Abbot, St, 228, 275  
Anthony of Orvieto, Father, 145  
Anthony of Padua, St, 120, 149, 150  
Antoniazio Romano, 267  
Antonio Stroncone, B., 203, 207  
Anversa, Vitale d', 156, 157  
Apollonio da Ripatransore, 214  
Apulia, 41, 42  
Aquila, 166, 175  
Arezzo, 256  
Arles, Chapter of, 262  
Armenino, 245  
Arrigo, Fr. 210  
Aspasius, the Roman Prefect, 8  
Avignon, 273, 274

**B**AGLIONI family, the, 179, 180,  
231  
Baldwin, Emperor of the Greeks, 147  
Barbarian Invasion of Italy, the, 9  
Barnabà Manassei of Terni, B., 203  
Bartholomew of Pisa, 132, 209  
Bartolomeo of Pian Castagnaio, Bro-  
ther, 211  
Basil, Bishop, 18  
Bastia, 179  
Beatrice, Countess of Tuscany, 19  
Beatrix, St, 88, 97  
Belli, Pasquale, 190, 220  
Benedict XI, Pope, 274  
—, St, 225  
Benedictines, the, 86  
Beringer II, King, 12  
Berlinghieri Bonaventura, 243, 250  
Bernard, St, 75  
— of Quintavalle, Brother, 66, 67,  
68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 93, 125, 159,  
201, 203  
Bernardino da Feltre, S., 173  
— di Mariotto, 275, 278  
Bernardino of Siena, S., 173, 174, 201,  
202, 215, 280  
Bernardone, Angelo, brother of St  
Francis, 23  
—, Pietro, father of St Francis, 22,  
23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 41, 47, 52,  
53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 84, 205, 207,  
208, 254, 255  
Bevagna, 2, 7, 105  
Bishops, Power of the Medieval, 14  
Blanche, Queen, mother of St Louis,  
148  
Blasco, Duke of Spoleto, 92, 164, 210  
Blessed Sacrament and St Nicholas,  
Chapel of, 205, 212, 213, 230  
Bologna, 116, 150  
Bonaventura, St, 28, 31, 40, 42, 45,  
48, 55, 57, 60, 66, 101, 115, 119,  
123, 130, 140, 153, 216, 227, 239,  
250-264  
Bonfigli, 275  
Boniface VIII, Pope, 161

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Boniface IX, Pope, 166  
 Bonino of Assisi, Brother, 211  
 Bonizio of Bologna, Brother, 124  
 Borgia, Cesare, 182  
 Borgo S. Sepolcro, 130  
 Bouvines, the Battle of, 84  
 Braccio, tyrant of Perugia, 166  
 Brienne, John de, 117, 210  
 —, Walter de, 41, 42, 117  
 Brizi, Guiseppe, 190  
 —, Galeozzo, 220  
 Byzantine Art, 249  
  
**C**AMPELLO, Fra Filippo, 204  
 Cannara, 162, 179  
 Capanna, Puccio, 254  
 Casa Gualdi, 135  
 Castano, 8  
 Cathari, the, 75  
 Cattani, Orlando dei, Count of Chiusi,  
 105  
 Cavallini, Pietro, 248  
 Ceprano, the old Assisan chronicler,  
 147  
 Cerchi, the, and St Francis, 210  
 Cerchiara, Fra Filippo da, 205  
 Charlemagne, 6, 10, 11, 176  
 Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of  
 Savoy, 215  
 Charles "le Gros," 11  
 Chiagio, the mountain torrent, 8, 18  
 Chiesa Nuova, 205, 206  
 Christian, bishop of Mentz, 20  
 Christina of Sweden, Queen, 186  
 Cibo, Leonardo, 178  
 —, Maurizio, 177, 178  
 Cimabue, 248, 249  
 Clare, St, 50, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93,  
 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 105, 109,  
 110, 126, 127, 131, 132, 139, 142,  
 144, 145, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158,  
 159, 186, 191, 192, 193, 197, 204,  
 205, 206, 207, 208, 216  
 Clarisses, the French, 154  
 Clement, St, 164  
 — V, Pope, 274  
 — VII, Pope, 183  
 Cloaca Maxima, the, 6, 10  
 Cola di Gumaro, 233  
 "Colle Inferno," renamed "Colle  
 Paradiso," 142, 143, 198

Comacine Masters, the, 198, 212, 214  
 Commerce, Italian, in the Middle  
 Ages, 22  
 Communes in Umbria, 35  
 Confidati, Alfonso, 184  
 Conrad of Lutzen, Duke, 20, 21, 163,  
 230  
 — of Spoleto, Duke, 35, 36  
 Confraternità delle Stimmate, Chapel  
 of, 233  
 Confraternity of St Lawrence, Chapel  
 of, 233  
 Conti, Cardinal de, 219  
 — Ringhieri, Bishop Ottavio dei,  
 188  
 Corano, Amata, 109, 110  
 —, Angeluccia, 110  
 —, Francesca, 110  
 —, Martino, 88  
 Cortona, 136, 151  
 Crescentius, Brother, 152  
 Crescenzi, Marcello, 191  
 Cristofani, 84, 86, 165, 180, 190  
 Crispolto, S., 2

**D**ANTE, 115, 161  
 Danti, Giulio, 185, 224  
 Dardanus, King, 5, 6  
 Della Robbia, Andrea, 225, 226  
 Devil's Hole, the, 203  
 Diocletian, 8  
 Diotallevi, Tiberio di, 206  
 Domenico della Bastia, Brother, 145  
 Domenico Antonio da S. Severino,  
 221, 264, 265  
 Dominic, St, 114, 115, 116  
 Domizio della Bastia, Fra, 186  
 Doni, Dono, 170, 183, 185, 211, 230  
 Duccio, 269, 270, 275  
 Duomo, the, Perugia. 267  
 Dupré, A., 230  
 — T., 230, 231

**E**CUBA, Queen of Cyprus, 210  
 Elias, Brother, 99, 108, 118, 123,  
 127, 131, 133, 140, 141, 142, 143,  
 144, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 199,  
 209, 242, 244, 248  
 Etruscans, the, 5  
 Eugenius IV, Pope, 176  
 Ezzelino of Padua, 99

# Index

- F**ELIX of Assisi, Brother, 192  
 Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, 225, 275, 279, 280  
 Fiumi, Count Alexander, 180  
 —, Franceschino, 167  
 —, Guido, 177  
 —, Jacopo dei, 178  
 —, Count Ulderico, 184  
 Florence, 99, 166  
 Foligno, 2, 19, 52, 60, 83, 91, 119, 127, 182, 276, 277  
 Fonte Colombo, 105  
 — dei Miracoli, the, 110  
 — Marcella, 183, 204  
 — Oliviera, 183, 198  
 Foresta, la, settlement of Friars at, 102  
 Forlì, 150  
 Fortebraccio, Oddo, 166  
 Forum of Sextus, the, 6, 7  
 Foundling Hospital at Todi, the, 106  
 Frances of Colledimezzo, Sister, 157  
 Francesco di Terranova, Brother, 211  
 Francesco, Muzio di, 162, 163, 212  
 Frederick Barbarossa, the Emperor, 20, 21  
 Frederick II, Emperor, 83, 96, 99, 114, 142, 147, 151, 156, 157, 206, 208, 209, 210, 230  
 Freeman, E. A., 6  
 Friars Minor (or Fratres Minores), the, 59, 63, 70, 77, 86, 87, 98, 99, 102, 108, 110, 115, 116, 123  
 — Preachers, the order of, 114  
 Fresco Painting, 244, 245
- G**ARZIA, son of Duke Blasco, 164, 210  
 Gentile, Conte, 41, 42  
 — da Fabriano, 278  
 Geri, Filippo, Bishop of Assisi, 185  
 Ghibellines, the, 2, 13, 19, 161-168, 174  
 Giacomina, "Frate," 136, 137, 146, 216, 218, 242, 243  
 Giampi, Bishop, 190  
 Gian Giacomo, da S. Severino, 231  
 Giles of Assisi, Brother, 70, 71, 72, 73, 125, 143, 144, 151, 152, 159, 201, 203
- Giotto, 248, 257, 262, 264, 268, 271, 275, 276  
 Giovanni da Gubbio, 230  
 Godfrey "the bearded," Duke, 18, 19  
 Gold, the use of by early Italian painters, 265, 266  
 Gozzoli, Benozzo, 233, 267, 275, 276, 281  
 Gratian, Brother, Provincial of Romagna, 150  
 Graziani, the Perugian chronicler, 167  
 Greccio, 243, 258  
 —, Convent of, 102, 105, 121  
 Greeks in Italy, the, 9  
 Gregorio Perna, Brother, 183  
 Gregory IX, Pope, 98, 107, 108, 109, 114, 117, 122, 131, 133, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 151, 152, 209, 240  
 — XIV, Pope, 191  
 Grottos, the Franciscan, 202, 203  
 Gubbio, 58, 59, 121  
 Guelfucci, Buona, 90, 91, 92, 109, 110  
 Guelfs, the, 2, 13, 19, 161-168, 174  
 Guido, Bishop of Assisi, 55, 56, 57, 76, 77, 81, 86, 134, 135, 146
- H**AWKWOOD, Sir John, 163  
 Haymo of Faversham, Brother, 152  
 Holy Rood, Chapel of the, 231  
 Honorius III, Pope, 109, 116, 117, 126, 131, 142  
 Hotels, 233
- I**LARIO di Viterbo, 225  
 Illuminata of Pisa, Sister, 157  
 Indulgence of the Porziuncula, the Great, 112, 113, 114  
 Innocent III, Pope, 81, 82, 83, 98, 105, 107, 108, 123  
 — IV, Pope, 99, 152, 215, 218  
 Innocenza da Palermo, Fra, 207  
 Iolanthe, wife of Frederic II, 210  
 Isabella, Princess, sister of St Louis 154
- J**ACOPONE DA TODI, 250  
 James of Campostella, S., 275  
 John XVII, Pope, 163  
 — XXII, Pope, 212

## *Assisi of St Francis*

John the Baptist, Feast of St, 199, 200  
 — of Capello, Brother, 74  
 — of Greccio, 258  
 —, King of Jerusalem, 147  
 — Parenti of Florence, Brother, 142,  
   149, 150  
 — of Parma, Brother, 152  
 — of Penna, Brother, 152  
 Juniper, Brother, 97, 144

**L**EGNANO, 20  
 Leo, Brother, 97, 102, 113, 124,  
   128, 129, 134, 137, 143, 144, 154,  
   159, 160, 206, 207, 215, 216, 217,  
   256  
 — X, Pope, 224  
 Lionardo, Monaldo di, 142  
 Locatelli, Vincenzo, 91, 92  
 Lombards, the, 9, 10, 20  
 Lorenzetti, Ambrogio and Pietro,  
   215, 248, 269-271  
 Loteringio of Pisa, 209  
 Louis, St (King Louis IX of France),  
   216, 274  
 —, St (Bishop of Toulouse), 219  
 Lucius, tribune of Maximus of  
   Thrace, 9  
 Lupone, Count of Assisi, 232

**M**ACCABEO, Abbot, 85, 86  
 Margaritone, 50, 250  
 Marni, 105  
 Martelli, 211  
 Martin, St, 253, 274  
 Martini, Simone, 205, 219, 248, 270,  
   272, 273, 276  
 Martyrs, Franciscan, 117  
 Masseo of Marignano, Brother, 112,  
   113, 125, 134, 201, 203  
 Matarazzo, Francesco, 180, 181, 182  
 Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, 19  
 Mats, the Chapter of, 115, 118, 119,  
   120, 150  
 Matteo da Gualdo, 228, 275  
 Maximus, Emperor of Thrace, 8, 9  
 Melozzo da Forlì, 267  
 Memmi, Lippo, 273  
 —, Donato, 274  
 Merchants, Travelling, in the Middle  
   Ages, 22, 23  
 Michele, Antonio di Messer, 167, 168

Michele d'Aqui, Brother, 177, 178  
 Michelotti, Biordo, 165  
 Missions, Franciscan Foreign, 100,  
   105, 109, 114, 116  
 Molari, Guglielmo dei, 161  
 Montaigne, 187  
 Monte Casale, 130  
 — Colombo, 124  
 Montefalco, 2, 276, 281  
 Monte Feltro, 105  
 Montefeltro, Guido da, 161, 162, 167  
 Monte Frumentario, the, 172, 198, 204  
 — Gargano, 89  
 — La Verna, 102, 105, 126, 128-130,  
   131, 133, 134, 217, 259, 260  
 Montepaolo, Hermitage of, 150  
 Monte di Pietà, the, 172, 173, 203  
 — Ripido, settlement of Friars at,  
   102, 159  
 — San Rufino, 17  
 — Subasio, 1, 5, 7, 45, 57, 58, 87, 88,  
   125, 165, 184, 190, 199, 201, 248,  
   276  
 — Subasio, Benedictine Abbey of,  
   60, 85, 125  
 Morico, Brother, 74  
 Mostarda, the Condottiere, 166  
 Museo Civico, Pisa, 244  
 — Civico, Siena, 266

**N**APOLEON I, Emperor, 188,  
   190, 202  
 Nepis Family, the, 165-168, 177-179,  
   233  
 Niccolò da Foligno, 275, 277, 278  
 — da Gubbio, 209  
 Nicholas II, Pope, 18  
 — IV, Pope, 216  
 Nocera, 166  
 Nuto, Francesco di Ser, 166

**O**FFREDUCCI, B. Balbina dei,  
   110  
 Oratory of St Clare, 208  
 Orsini, Gaetano, 212  
 —, Niccolò, 180  
 —, Don Tommaso, 216  
 Ortolana, wife of Count Favorino  
   Scefi, 88, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 97, 109  
 Osservanti, the, 175  
 Otho I, Emperor, 12, 13



# Index

Otho IV, Emperor of Brunswick, 83  
 Ottobuoni, the Milanese Captain,  
     165  
 Overbeck, 225  
 Ozanam, Antoine F., 133

**P**ALAZZO COMUNALE, 85, 161,  
     179

— Fiumi, 204, 233  
 — Giacobetti, 198  
 — Guelfucci, 92  
 — Sbaraglini, 66, 67  
 — Scefi, 91, 92, 204  
 Paolo Toscanello, 281  
 — Uccello, 276, 281

Paolucci, Signor Loccatelli, 131

Parma, 243

Partino da Montefiore, Cardinal  
     Gentile, 211, 219, 274

Parva Basilica, 18

Patarini, the, 75

Paul II, Pope, 177

— III, Pope, 182, 183, 232

— de Trinci, Blessed, 201

Pedro, Don, brother of Alphonso II,  
     117, 118

Pellegrini, Chiesa dei, 227, 275, 276

Peretti, Cardinal Alessandro, 203

Perugia, 2, 19, 20, 36, 37, 38, 82, 112,  
     113, 119, 134, 145, 156, 162, 163,  
     166, 167, 176, 177, 179, 180, 181,  
     182, 279

Perugino, 206, 280

Pescia, 243

Peter of Catania, Brother, 70, 71, 73,  
     108, 118

Philip Augustus, King of France, 84

— III, King of Spain, 205

— of Campello, Brother, 152, 153

— "the long," Brother, 74, 93

Piazza Garibaldi, 204

— Grande, the, 6, 174, 199, 229, 233,  
     275

— Inferiore di S. Francesco, 209

— Minerva, 85

— Nuova, 7, 18, 178

— Sta Chiara, 204, 206

— S. Rufino, 229

— Vescovado, 18, 55

Pica, Madonna, mother of St Fran-  
     cis, 23, 24, 25, 26, 55

Piccinino, Niccolò, 176, 232

Piccio, Simone di, 142

Pier Antonio da Foligno, 228, 275

Piero della Francesca, 266, 275, 276,  
     280

Pietro Damiano, S., 18

Pinacoteca at Perugia, the, 241, 280

—, The, Terni, 267

Pinturicchio, 265, 279

Pisa, 151

Pisano, Giunta, 50, 151, 218, 221,  
     224, 226, 241, 250

Pistoia, 244, 245

Pius II, Pope, 232

— VI, Pope, 159, 189

— IX, Pope, 191

Poggio Bonsi, 122,

— Bustone, Convent of, 102

Poletti, the architect, 224

Pontani da Todì, Bishop Tebaldo,  
     211, 212

Ponte San Giovanni, 2, 36, 37

Poor Clares, the, 63, 96, 97, 98, 102,  
     109, 145, 154, 207

"Poor Men of Lyons," the, 75

Poppi, Ser Verga da, 163

Porta Cappuccini, 124, 201

— Moiana, 55

— Nuova, the, 25, 50, 83, 206

— Perlici, the, 18, 233

— S. Francesco, the, 60, 209, 224

— San Giacomo, 17, 223, 233

— S. Pietro, 227

— Scefi, 92

— Sementone, 164

— Vecchia, 90

Portraiture of St Francis, 238-244

Porziuncula, the, see Sta Maria  
     della P.

Propercius, 7, 8

**R**APHAEL, 280, 281

— Relics, Chapel of the, 224

Religious Orders, Development of  
     the, 14

Reynerio, Cardinal, 119, 146

Rieti, 105, 124, 131, 133, 150

Rinaldo, Duke, 156

Ringhiera dell' Umbria, the, 2

Rivo Torto, 2, 48, 59, 82, 86, 200, 231,  
     232

## *Assisi of St Francis*

- Robert of Anjou, King of Naples, 219, 273  
 Robinson, Father Paschal, 49, 133, 216  
 Rocca Maggiore, the, 17, 20, 36, 163, 165, 177, 183, 223, 232, 233  
 — Minore, 17  
 Roman annexation of Umbria, 5, 6, 7  
 — Empire, decline of, 8, 9, 10  
 Rondinini, Cardinal, 186  
 Rosa, Salvator, 205  
 Roses, The Legend of the, 226  
 —, Chapel of the, 227  
 Rotharis, King of the Lombards, 212  
 Rufino, Brother, 90, 97, 125, 128, 129, 134, 144, 159, 160, 201, 203, 215  
 Rufinus, St, 8, 17, 18, 231  
 Rule of the Friars Minor, 80, 81, 98, 101  
 — of the Poor Clares, 98, 99, 110  
 — of the Tertiaries, 122, 123  
 Rusiti, Filippo, 255
- S**ABATIER, M. Paul, 50, 102, 206  
 Sabbatino, Brother, 74  
 Sabina, Cardinal John, Bishop of, 81, 107  
 Sabinus, St, 8, 9, 18  
 Sacro Speco, the, of Subiaco, 240  
 S. Andrea, Church of, Spello, 279  
 St Anthony the Abbot, Chapel of, 164, 210  
 St Anthony the Abbot, Confraternity of, 170  
 S. Angelo di Panzo, Convent of, 93, 94, 95, 96  
 St Anthony of Padua, Chapel of, 211  
 S. Benedetto, the Abbey of, 86, 165  
 St Bernardino, Chapel of, 202  
 S. Bernardino, Church of, Urbino, 162  
 St Catherine, Chapel of, 164  
 Sta Chiara, the Convent and Church of, 1, 25, 50, 154, 181, 191, 204, 205, 207, 233  
 St Crispin, Guild of, 172  
 Sta Croce, Church of, Florence, 210, 244, 263  
 S. Damiano, Church and Convent of, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 59, 60, 63, 64, 83, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99, 105, 109, 110, 126, 127, 131, 139, 140, 144, 156, 188, 205, 206-209, 232, 254  
 S. Francesco, Basilica and Friary of, 1, 151-153, 161, 164, 166, 170, 174, 176, 179, 181, 183, 186, 188, 189, 190, 197, 204, 209-224, 242, 247, 250, 251, 266-275  
 S. Francis, Church of, Montefalco, 267, 276, 277  
 S. Francesco a Ripa, Rome, 243  
 S. Francescuccio, Chapel of, 206  
 St Francis, Conventual Church of, Arezzo, 282  
 S. Giorgio, the Church of, 71, 139, 140, 145, 148, 159, 205  
 S. Giorgio, the Canons of, 25, 84  
 St Gregory, The Confraternity of, 170  
 St Jerome, Chapel of, 206  
 St John Baptist, Chapel of, 174, 215  
 St Joseph, Chapel of, 225  
 St Louis and St Stephen, Chapel of, 211  
 Sta Maria degli Angeli, Church and Basilica, of, 2, 50, 63, 65, 82, 91, 92, 94, 107, 112, 113, 118, 130, 135, 136, 139, 151, 169, 171, 185, 191, 200, 201, 224-227, 231, 242, 243  
 Sta Maria delle Carceri, 123, 124, 125, 192, 201, 202  
 Sta Maria Maggiore, Church of, 18, 55, 84, 227, 238, 251  
 Sta Maria Maggiore, Rome, 255  
 Sta Maria di Monte Celli, Convent of, 99, 109, 155  
 Sta Maria della Porziuncula, 60, 63, 64, 65, 70, 72, 74, 76, 77, 78, 80, 83, 87, 91, 92, 98, 100, 107, 112, 114, 118, 119, 130, 133, 135, 139, 160, 191, 202, 224, 225, 280  
 Sta Maria delle Rose, Church of, 233  
 St Martin, Chapel of, 219, 220, 271  
 St Mary Magdalene, Chapel of, 211, 232  
 S. Masseo, Basilica of, 232  
 St Nicholas, Chapel of, 271  
 S. Paolo, Convent of, 92

## Index

- St Peter, Basilica of, 115  
 St Peter, Cathedral of, in Rome, 46, 47  
 St Peter of Alcantara, Chapel of, 219  
 S. Pietro, Abbey of, 227, 232  
 S. Pietro, Church of, 60, 63  
 S. Rufino, Cathedral of, 6, 17, 24, 38, 50, 70, 84, 85, 90, 142, 229, 233, 278  
 S. Rufino d'Arce, Chapel of, 231  
 S. Salvatore in Pariete, Hospital of, 169  
 St Sebastian, Chapel of, 220  
 S. Severino, Convent of, 155  
 St Stephen, Confraternity of, 170  
 St Vitus the Hermit, Chapel of, 230  
 Sangiorgi, Eusebio, 208  
 Sancia, Duchess of Spoleto, 164  
 Sansone, General Francesco, 210  
 "Saracens," The, 156, 157  
 Sasso Rosso, 88  
 Scefi, Favorino, Court of Sasso Rosso, 88, 89, 90, 92, 94, 95, 96, 109  
 —, Monaldo, 95, 96,  
 —, Paolo, 95  
 —, Penenda, wife of Martino Corano, 88, 109  
 Sermei of Orvieto, 211  
 Settesoli, Giacoma di, 136, 137, 146, 216, 218, 242, 243  
 Sforza, Alessandro, 176, 177  
 —, Gian Galeazzo, Duke of Milan, 165, 166  
 —, Giovanni Maria, 166  
 —, Giovanni, 176  
 Signorelli, 265, 266  
 Sixtus IV, Pope, 211, 232, 267  
 — V, Pope, 203  
 Spagna, Giovanni, 226  
 Specchi, Niccolò, 210  
 Spello, 2, 7, 83, 93, 110, 119, 164, 179, 231, 279  
 Spoleto, 2, 7, 9, 10, 18, 19, 43, 119, 166  
 —, Valley of, 1, 17, 36, 37, 52, 162, 199  
 Stanislaus, St, 218  
 Stefano Fiorentino, 164, 218  
 Sterpeto, 177  
 Sylvester, Brother, 80, 105, 125, 201, 203, 257
- T**ERTIARIES, the, or Third Order, 63, 111, 122  
 Tescio, the River, 18  
 Theresa of Avila, St, 155  
 Thomas Aquinas, St, 115  
 — of Celano, 24, 25, 27, 40, 53, 72, 74, 77, 78, 91, 99, 100, 101, 108, 128, 132, 139, 238, 250  
 — of Eccleston, Brother, 114, 149, 150  
 "Three Companions," the, 25, 37, 38, 43, 44, 46, 47, 54, 56, 60, 64, 239  
 Tintoretto, 248  
 Todi, 19, 106, 182,  
 Tomacelli, Giovanni, 166  
 Tornaquinci, Cipriano de, 161  
 Torriti, Jacopo, 248  
 Totila King, 9  
 Trino, Broglia di, 165  
 Trouvères of Provence, the, 27  
 Truce of God, the, 162  
 Tute, Marcello, 204
- U**FFIZI, the, 266  
 Ugolino, Cardinal, see Gregory IX, Pope  
 —, Conte, 164  
 Ugone, Bishop, 17, 18  
 Umbri, the, 5  
 Umiliana (Cerchi), B., 210  
 Urban V, Pope, 163
- V**ALENTINO da Udine, Brother, 211  
 Vallegloria, Convent of, at Spello, 110, 155  
 Van Eyck, 262  
 Vansini, Ignazio, 211  
 Vasari, 245, 246  
 Venanzi, C. G., 230  
 Venturi, Signor Adolfo, 151, 153, 209, 212, 220  
 Venturio, 211  
 Venutius, Prefect of Tuscany, 8, 9  
 Via degli, Esposti, 198  
 — Garibaldi, 172, 204, 233  
 — Gregorio, 66, 67, 70  
 — Nuova, the, 54  
 — Principe di Napoli, 170, 198, 227, 275

## *Assisi of St Francis*

Via Santa Chiara, 55, 92, 204  
— di S. Rufino, 229  
Victor, St, 227  
— Emanuel, King, 193  
Vignola, 224  
Villa Gualdi, 224  
Viterbo, 164  
Voragine, Jacopo di, 228

**W**ENCESLAS, King of Bohemia, 147  
William, Brother, an English Franciscan, 214

**Z**ELANTI, the, 141, 151, 153, 154



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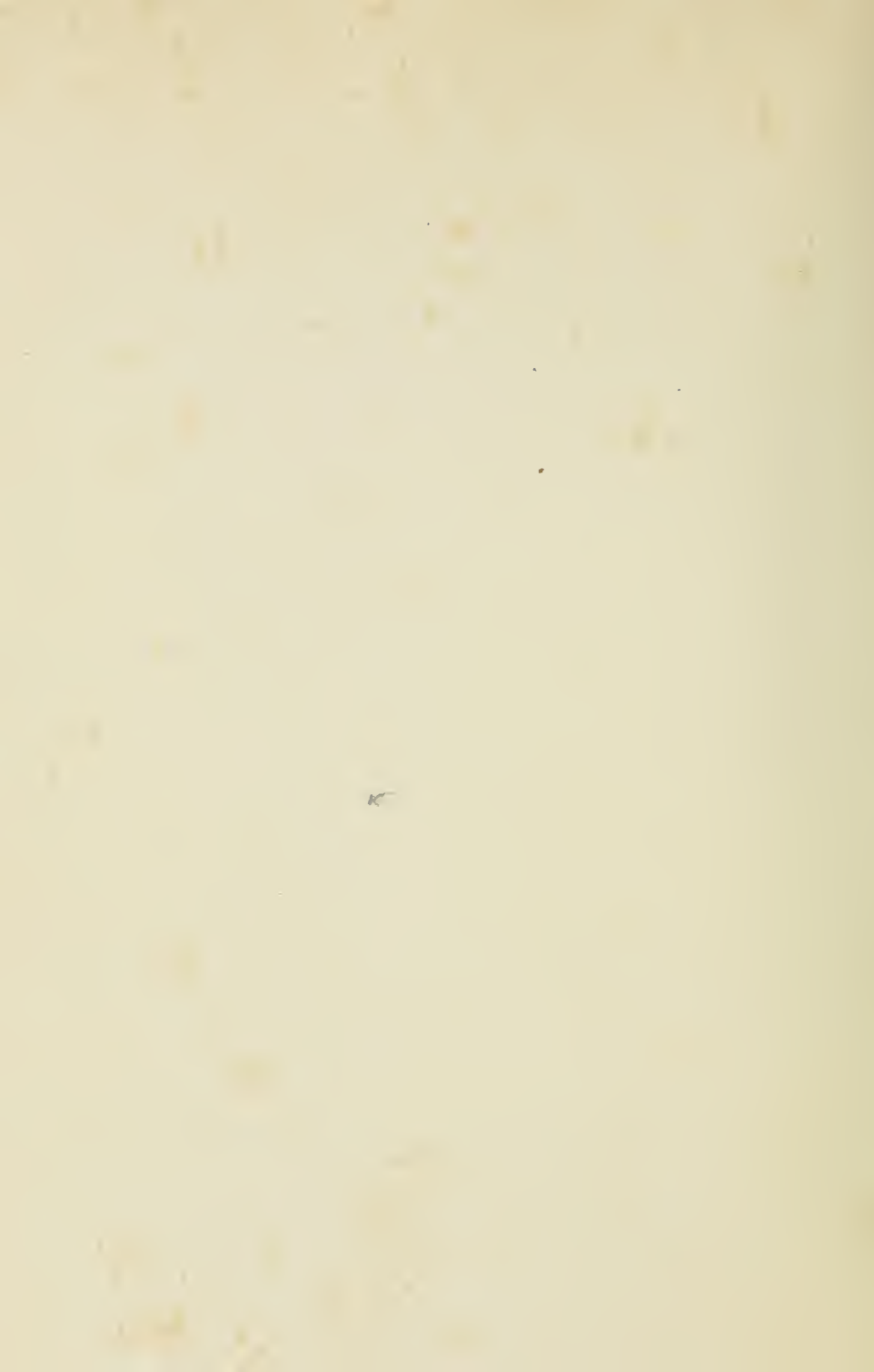
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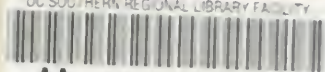








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